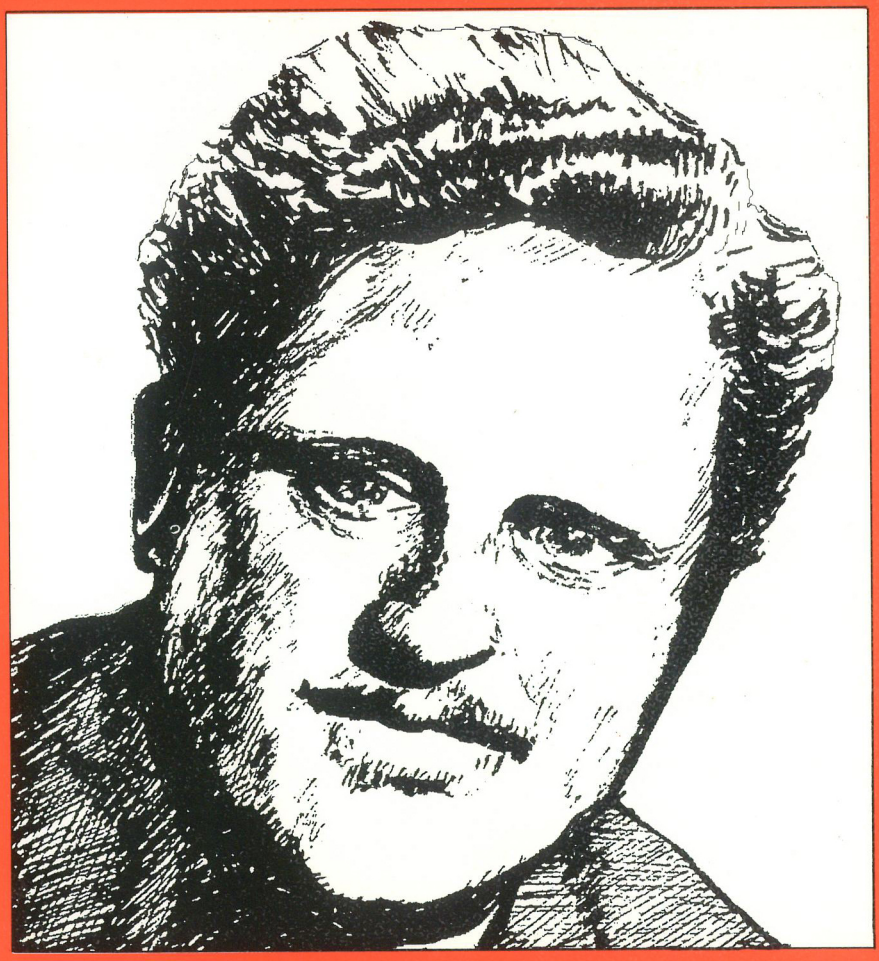
ENCORE!

THE HARRY BAILEY STORY

BY HARRY BAILEY AND TOM O'SHEA



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HARRY BAILEY

ENCORE

The Harry Bailey Story

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ACT I

Long Long Ago

I remember it well. A little hall in a small coastal village in Co. Kerry. We were putting on the *The Miner's Dream of Home*. The weather was atrocious. Rain hopped off the galvanised roof, wind howled 'round the hall and the sea crashed on the nearby rocks. A perfect setting for a young family starving in it's cottage, awaiting the return of the husband who had just started work down the local coalmine. Suddenly, there was a devastating explosion. We had arranged this, of course, by one of our company striking a railway detonator or fog signal with a sledge hammer. Immediately after the explosion, smoke wafted onto the stage through the open stage door. The right atmosphere for the man who rushes in the cottage door, shouting "It's the mine, it's the mine, there's been an explosion at the mine!!!" You could say it went down like a bomb with the audience. They loved it. After the show, an old R.I.C. Sergeant and Constable arrived at the stage door. "Who's in charge here?" said the Sergeant. "I am", said my father. "Do you take responsibility for the explosion", says he. "Of course", says my father, "Put that down in your little book", says he, turning to the Constable. "And, you take responsibility for the expenses also I suppose", said he. "What expenses?" said my father. "I'm afraid Sir, I'll have to summon you", he said, with a tone of regret, "Your explosion has just launched our lifeboat".

If you find that story amusing, bear with me, there's more to come.

A few weeks ago, I opened up a copy of *Ireland's Own* and there was my reflection looking back at me, in an article called *A Master of Laughter*! "What's wrong with that?" says you. Well, I suppose, nothing much, except that in big bold lettering, bordering my photo, ran the following: "Ireland has produced some of the funniest comedians over the years!' Leo Bowes recalls one such character -"the late Harry Bailey". Admittedly, the photo did not do me justice, but the "Late" Harry Bailey. My God, all my life, I've been the most punctual person.

I was born in Limerick on Christmas Day 1909. My mother was a little disappointed. I think she was expecting a turkey. In the last eighty years, I've always felt that life has had the strange tendency of dealing me the most unexpected cards. If you doubt that, just meet me at a swimming pool and I'll give you a lesson in drowning.

I've had my ups and downs, and, indeed, on occasions, must have felt like the workman who fell fifty feet into a hole. The foreman dashed over and said, "Did you break anything?" "No, Sir", said the workman, "There was nothing in the hole". Father spent most of the day I was born staring out of the window. Maybe he was waiting for a star to appear in the sky. The Shannon River flowed directly under my birth place, Nolans' Cottages. Our cottage was so damp that father often caught fish in the mouse-trap. When the Corporation demolished Nolans' Cottages my father rented a kind of flat in Boherbuoy, Limerick. It was so dingy and dirty that even the mice wore overalls. The previous lodger had swept so much dust under the carpet that you had to walk uphill to the piano. There was a notice on the wall which read: "Don't shake the sheets out of the window. The chickens have been fed already." There were plenty of cracks on the walls, but I couldn't read them as they were in French.

My schooling started at the local Presentation Convent. In no time, I was chosen to play the title role in *Goldilocks* at the Christmas Pantomime, mostly, I hope, because of my long, blond curly hair. At this time, of course, boys up to the ages of five or

HARRY BAILEY
Famous Irish Tenor and Comedian

At the Banba Club, Kilburn High Road, London.

Limerick Cottage, where I was born on Christmas Day, 1909.
Father, centre of photo, and Mother, on his right.

six, used to wear velvet suits and had their hair in ringlets. I was in such a hurry to get home and tell my granny that I was to be a future child star that I decided to take a shortcut. Without realising it at the time, this decision was typical of many I took in later life. The shortcut involved squeezing through the park railings. Maybe, I was always big headed, but, anyway, on this occasion, I succeeded in getting my head stuck in the railings. The firebrigade had to be called, and the firemen had no option but to cut off my lovely crop of golden curls. Whoever heard of a semi-bald Goldilocks? But that's showbusiness, I suppose!

A year later, I was sent to Sexton Street Christian Brothers. I regret to say that they didn't do for me what they did for Gay Byrne and Terry Wogan. However, I don't blame them. Miracles are difficult at any time. I was rather a rebellious pupil and stood in the corners of classrooms for so long that I developed a

My First Holy Communion. Limerick, 1915.

somewhat triangular shape to my forehead. I began to imagine myself as being the first dunce with a beard. It had to come to a head, and one day it did. They presented me with a pair of running shoes, a road-map, pointed me North, and off the family went to Derry.

Poverty followed us, as well as my school-day problems. We lived in Ship Quay Street and I was sent to the local Christian Brothers, who obviously must have mislaid my track record with their Chapter in Limerick. School and I still didn't see things in the light of "the best days of your life". On my very first day in my new school, the local boys initiated me by throwing me into a stinking midden, a tradition derived from the Scots. As if this

wasn't unpleasant enough, I received a few backhanders from my granny when I came home in such a foul-smelling state. Duly removed from the C.B.S., I was now sent to the Long Tower School in Derry. Before long, the family moved to Portrush so you can see how fragmented my education was. You may also wonder where my father and mother were during these formative years. They were touring so we saw very little of them. Travel then was far more difficult than today, so Granny, my sisters and I more or less reared one another.

Portrush opened up a new and exciting phase in my life, but before I look back to those happy days, I feel I must tell you something of my family history.

When my father's grandfather arrived in England, he settled in the village of Lutterworth where he bought the Dutton Basset Estate and lived the life of a country gentleman. His name was Silvanus Daniels. Some say he was a Jew, and to support their claim they say "Where else could he have got his money?" Many a time over the years, when going through a bad stretch, I have said to myself that "wasn't it a pity I hadn't saved up myself to be a Jew!" Due respect to all concerned here, naturally. Silvanus Daniels had a son of the same name and he was a bit of a wild lad. Incidentally, I gleaned all this information by a visit to the Office of Births & Marriages in the lovely village of Lutterworth. Silvanus Junior rode with the local hounds and was known as Fiery Daniels, because of his red hair. He fell in love with the beautiful barmaid at the Bull's Head Inn, married her and had four children, three boys and a girl. They were named Clarence Kiddenham Daniels, Bracey Sheriff, John Daniels, Harry Silvanus Daniels and Elsie, who later married a farmer in Co. Westmeath, after answering a newspaper advert. for a marriage partner. My father was Clarence Kiddenham.

Grandfather Silvanus mortgaged his Estate, went to London and began the long-standing family tradition of showbusiness. He bought into a trick cycling act, later joined the Lord George Sangers Circus and, according to family tradition, eventually did a Command Performance before Queen Victoria in the grounds

My maternal Grandmother, centre of photo, performing at a Mumming Booth or Penny Gaggie in Glasgow, c. 1860.

of Windsor Castle in 1894. At that time his act was known as the Royal Silvani Troop of Cyclists comprising the father and sons. As part of the act my father used to perform bicycle tricks on a platform which was strapped to an elephant, which, in turn, paraded around the circus ring.

Pennyfarthing bicycles also played a big part in their performance. There were accidents too, so when I say that the circus was in our family blood, you can take it literally, as well.

Before the turn of the century, the Silvani Troop came to Ireland to join up with the Lloyd Brothers' Irish Circus. Successful touring seasons followed. The Lloyd brothers had some wonderful acts. One slack wire act finished up with each brother

playing a violin and somersaulting over the other while still playing, and on the wire. At that time their Circus had over one hundred horses. The only performance some of those horses ever did was to pull the circus wagons from town to town. Father used to help one of the Lloyd brothers when the Circus was in transit. While he held the reins, young Lloyd carried the old muzzle-loading rifle, which they both used on occasions to bag the odd unsuspecting hare or rabbit. One fine morning, on the Ring of Kerry, as young Lloyd sat on the front board with the gun between his legs resting on the back of the wagon, the tragedy happened. A jolt from the road, the lock hit the hammer and Lloyd was accidentally shot through the head. Killed outright, it was a very sad ending to a fine and reputable Circus.

Before I proceed any further with my father's showbusiness activities, I must fill you in with the history of my mother's side of the family. Don't forget, I'm in Portrush and my ascending star has not, as yet, threatened the world stage.

As with my father's family, mother's was equally illustrious in the showbusiness scene. Her family came from Scotland, grandmother being born in Edinburgh, and mother herself in Glasgow, but, as with all touring families, it's not where you've come from that matters but where you're going. Mother's grandfather leased the old *National Theatre* in Limerick, so the lure of the stage must have come from that side of the family too. He also had a Gaggie, which was a kind of Booth in Vinegar Hill, Glasgow and another in Belfast, so over six months of the year plays were performed at the three venues of Limerick, Belfast and Glasgow. My great-grandfather employed over fifty actors and actresses and, indeed, was a star himself of the old penny gaggie days of revue. The word "gaggie" came from the art of gagging, which was used by actors, when actors forgot their lines. Well-known comedian, Will Fyffe's father also owned a gaggie. Although Will was a wonderful comedian, he was better known for his tightness with money, which was well known by his contemporaries. It was reported that when he proposed to take one of the girls out on a Sunday, they would first toss a coin and the loser would go out with him.

But to get back to my mother, Carrie Ferguson. Her father was a well-known comedian, but one who enjoyed drink more than comedy. The problem was to get him sober on stage. The normal procedure was to lock him in his dressingroom for an hour prior to the show. But that didn't deter him at all. He used to use a light rope to pull up bottles through the dressingroom window, having made prior arrangement with an external drinking acquaintance. Eventually released from his dressingroom prison, he would fall out the door but, happily, was always capable of ad-libbing his way through the comedy parts he played. My mother's mother was a tight-rope walker and her circus was visiting Plymouth the same time as King Edward, then Prince of Wales, was visiting there. My grandmother's caravan was parked near the beach while the Prince's yacht was moored in the harbour. He was, I believe, very partial to showbusiness people, as indeed, the Royalty has always been. An arrangement was made whereby a rope was attached to an installation on the quay and also to the mast of the Prince's yacht. Exciting news travels fast and in no time the harbour was thronged with people. To quote the Newspapers of the following day:

As a young lady walked across the rope, with an anxious parent rowing beneath, everybody watched with bated breath. At last she reached the mast and descended to the tumultuous applause of the crowd. The Prince stepped forward, pinned a medal on her breast and, kissing her, placed a bouquet of flowers in her arms.

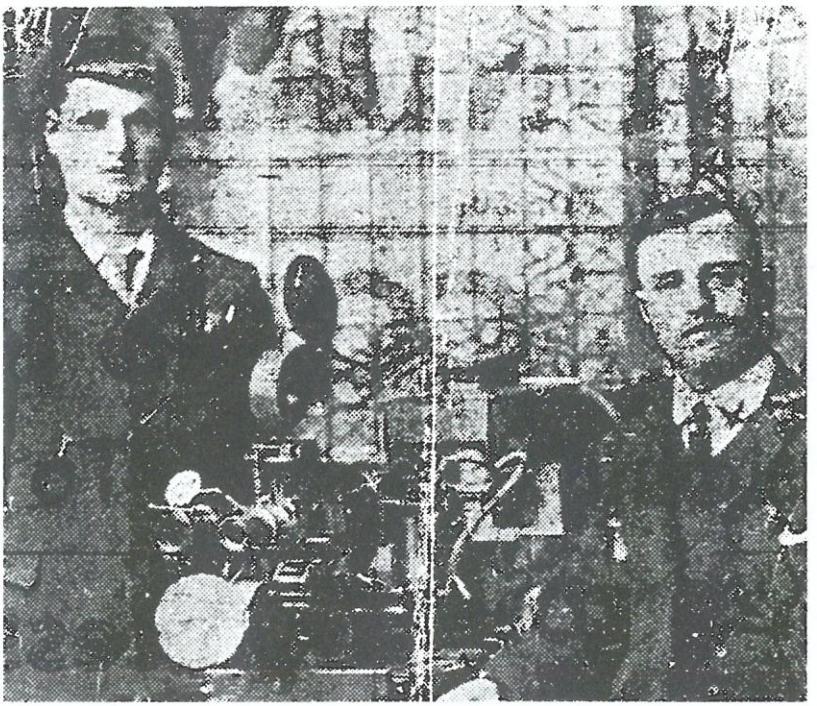
I'm proud to say that the brave young lady was my grandmother. Of course, I always knew that I had royal blood in my veins.

My mother was a wonderful actress and very popular at the turn of the century. Carrie Ferguson is still fondly remembered in Limerick today. She was leading lady in most of the shows of her day. She relished playing in *East Lynne* and the musical comedy *Indian Prince*. In *Napoleon and Josephine*, she played Josephine. Naturally enough, I suppose. She used to dress up as an officer of the Connaught Rangers and in her military uniform gave a tear-filled rendering of *Only a piece of khaki your Daddy wore at Mons*.

Limerick was a famous winter-quarters for many shows. At any one time you could have Transfields, Battys, Hannafords John Duffys, Buff Bills, Chipperfields, Fossetts, Scotts, Corvenios and more, all hibernating in Limerick. When my mother's six month touring stint finished each year, she always returned to *The National Theatre* in Limerick. The Circus and Showbusiness world are very closely inter-related through marriage, so it came as no surprise when my father and mother met up together in Limerick. My first cousin George Daniels married Margo McLean whose mother was a sister of John Duffy. Margo's father was Hamish McLean of Glasgow, a well-known Highland and Irish dancer. John Duffy's brother James married Lena Keys, a beautiful wire-walker. One could go on and on with the innumerable family ties in the Circus World. Even my own two sisters, Cherrie and Patricia married the Taylor Brothers and the Taylors carried on the show business tradition, playing at different times with Harry Lynton and also in my mother's show. My youngest sister, Beenie, was born eight years after my other sisters and was nick-named Encore, on account of her not being on the original programme. My sisters were born in Limerick, Belfast and Derry. Funny how they all got together!

When my father married my mother, he was involved in Cinematography This was after the unfortunate collapse of the Lloyd Circus. The remainder of the Silvani Troop joined up with other circuses. My father's first venture into the area of cinema was through the magic lantern. He travelled Ireland showing his slides and accompanied them with a running commentary. On most occasions he received payment in kind. Sometimes a pound of butter or a dozen of eggs. At other times he received a pound of sugar, a pair of old shoes, a skirt and there were even times when he received money. The goods taken in at the door could all be bartered at the ever-present local rag-market. It all helped to keep the wolf from the door. When animated pictures came on the scene, my father and his brother Bracey introduced the first gas-operated movie machine to Ireland. Later my father bought a steam-engine, with a dynamo mounted on front and

became one of the first men in Ireland to travel and show electric pictures. In the development of Cinematography, the big step from gas to electric movies was a step of major significance.



My father Clarence, on right, and Uncle Bracey, with the first projector used to show films in Ireland. Every four minutes, the programme had to be interrupted as film boxes held only 250 feet. Projector now in American Museum.

In some of the areas visited, the locals had never before seen an electric bulb and when the engine arrived in the village, it was greeted with awe and amazement. Once the engine was started up, the coloured lights on the canopy illuminated the whole area and the numerous on-lookers loudly applauded. My Uncle Bob always took a bow at this early stage of the proceedings. The Wallace and Stephens steam-engine was a beautiful

job and the joy and pride of my father. It had eight rolled brass pillars holding up the canopy and was envied by all who viewed it. He also bought a Pullman caravan at this time, so things must have been good. So good, in fact, that he changed his name from Daniels to Bailey, his mother's name.

Bob, my uncle, used to drive the engine and operate the machine for showing the pictures. After her marriage mother sang to song slides, while father took the money at the door. One must remember that there were no cinemas in most Irish towns or villages at that time, or, indeed, no electric light, unless privately owned. So the arrival of *Bailey's Electric Pictures*, with the name lit up in coloured bulbs on the canopy, was an event of major importance to many a country town. The local kids would follow the engine to the local river to collect water and then stand in sheer amazement as Uncle Bob switched on the lights.

I missed most of the early days of the family's travelling cinema for two reasons, the first being the fact that I wasn't yet born, and the second that I was settled in Portrush with my grandmother, during its peak period.

I made a lot of friends in Portrush including the Bradleys, the McVallys, who owned an hotel, the Rodish family and, most important to me, at that time, Ernest Devito, whose father owned a fish and chip shop. I nearly forgot Fred Daly. We often caddied together, never realising that Fred would be a world-famous golfer one day and I would be—well, I'll leave that up to yourself. We often caddied for the Parish Priest and Protestant Minister, who were great pals and played together. The same could be said for Fred and myself.

I'll have to intervene with a little story here as it involves Fred. When I left Portrush I didn't see him again until 1944. That year I had engaged the local townhall in Portrush for a week's show. Our company arrived under the management of Paddy Tyrrell, who promptly unloaded all the props and spent hours carrying them down one hundred and fifty stone steps to the Arcadia. In the meantime, I arrived at the townhall. No sign

With my mother, Limerick 1916.

of the company. I was a bit worried, needless to say. However, news soon reached me that the stage was nearly complete at the Arcadia. I blew a fuse, but calmed down when I realised that Paddy was too big to hit. Another lorry had to be engaged. All the props including a piano taken back up the one hundred and fifty steps, but we still managed to open on time that night. Our troubles weren't over yet. We opened that night to a miserable door of five pounds. Just before the curtain went up Paddy said to me: "I told you not to come to this fecking town", not realising that the microphone was switched on. I can assure you that the audience, limited as it was, was not too enamoured at all at our

lack of appreciation of their beautiful town—which, indeed, it was and is. However, enter Fred Daly, unbeknown to himself, to the rescue. That Wednesday Fred won the Open in Portrush. I went along and when he auctioned the winning golf ball, I bought it for twenty pounds. It was a master stroke. Fred immediately recognised me and threw his arms around me. The townhall was packed for the rest of the week. We had a couple of drinks and reminisced over the days when we each received one shilling and sixpence for carrying a heavy set of golf clubs over eighteen holes as well as cleaning them and the golfers' shoes, after the game. At that time, Granny used to give me a penny going to school, so you can imagine how important the caddying was to me.

However, my happy days in Portrush were about to become a thing of the past.

Remember that at this early age the films shown by my father were silent films. It was becoming more and more necessary to supplement them with music, and, as well, film-showing only occupied approximately six months of the year, while the other six were devoted to putting on plays, up and down the country. Father decided I was academically qualified to leave school. He needed somebody to play child parts. I wholeheartedly agreed with him in the former. The latter I wasn't too sure about. In those days, children were born to serve their parents. At any rate, my schoolmaster presented me with a one string fiddle and told me that when I had learnt to play it, my father could buy me a bow. That schoolmaster was in the wrong profession. He should have been on the stage. I was on the move again and this time it was back to Limerick, which would serve as base-camp for my travels.

I now started my theatrical career in earnest. I played Little Willie in *East Lynne*, Stephanus in the *Sign of the Cross* and any other child's part, as required. Contrary to my earlier doubts, I loved it. The show usually started with variety acts, then on to a drama and finished with a comedy sketch. I had to do a song nightly. I wasn't too keen on this at times and had to be pushed

onto the stage. One song I hated singing was *I'm Mammy's Little Man*. Our show consisted of Bert Duval, his mother, wife and daughter, the McKenny family, Bobby Ferguson, Harry Russell, Dave Lewellyn and my sister Cherrie on the piano. Talk about family entertainment!

As regards venues, the world was our oyster. I remember playing in a blacksmith's forge in Dunshaughlin and in an old church in Trim. Once when playing in an old church in Oldcastle, during the show Bert Duval came through a broken window as Dracula. He finished up lying in a coffin on the stage and had a stake driven through his heart. That night, the audience were so frightened that they refused to leave the church. Just imagine my terror. I had to sleep in the Vestry that night. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* always proved to be equally as frightening. Dave Lewellyn told me that once while they were playing The Royal Divorce with Charlie Doyle's Company in Adare, Co. Limerick, Lord Dunraven and a party came to see Charlie Doyle play Napoleon. Dave walked on the stage dressed in an old cut-away morning coat, a pair of tin canister epaulets, a pair of longjohns stuffed into a pair of farmers' wellingtons, an old french sword stuck into his sash and a mock-up pirates hat with a cockatrice. There was a polite ripple of laughter as he took out his snuff box to take a sniff. He turned on the audience, stared at them and said: "Go on, laugh at me, you peasants. Just wait, until you see Josephine!"

Another time we were playing *The Sign of the Cross*. In the Grave Scene, Marcus Superbus, disguised as a Christian arrived at the secret meeting place and uttered the password "Who goes there?". The runner answers "A Fisherman". Marcus says "Are you a fisherman from the Tiber?". Runner replies "No, a fisherman from Gallilee". Marcus then says "Pass, friend" That was fine until one night Jack Chambers had to play the runner's part. Now Jack's main function was to put up the bills for the show and sweep up the hall in preparation for the show. He had a Dublin accent that would cut butter. Marcus asked him was he "a fisherman from the Tiber?" and he boldly answered "No Sir, I'm a fisherman from Tralee". That's how stars are born!

When Shakespeare said, "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions", he must have had the Baileys in mind. Around the same time we had an English escapologist in our troop. In order to attract an audience we would handcuff him to some railings adjacent to wherever we were playing at the time. On one occasion we handcuffed him to the townhall clock in Athy. This was done some hours before the show opened and then he should have appeared on stage before the show closed, to complete his act. He never seemed to have any problem slipping his handcuffs, but in Athy he was not that lucky. Somebody else had added a pair of extra 'cuffs, from which there was no escape. It was four in the morning before the local blacksmith could be found to hacksaw him free. From then on he was rather reluctant to participate in this type of advertising gimmickry. I suggested to him that he should attempt to cross the Irish sea on a plank but he said that he couldn't get one long enough.

On another occasion while performing at Baldoyle, near Dublin, an itinerant walked onto the show, just tipped his cap and said: "It's O.K., lads, I'm a traveller like yourselves". We removed him alright, but once outside, he shook hands with me, with his boot. This action prompted four local Baldoyle men to toss him into the sea, which was just over the wall, behind the hall. It was probably the first time he'd seen water since he was baptized.

I remember the time my father bought an old carrier lorry, in the town of Hospital, Co. Limerick. We were playing nearby Emly at the time. This lorry had solid tyres and was chain-driven. There was no cab or body on it, so Uncle Bob built a driving seat, a temporary affair and put a flat body on the chassis. He gave me a couple of driving lessons on the Saturday and Sunday and then told me that I had passed my driving test. I had never driven anything before in my life. The piano was used as a back rest and, on travelling day, a few baskets were placed behind to steady the piano. Talk about Kamikaze. Uncle Bob started the engine, put it into second gear, handed the steering wheel to me

and jumped off. He was required to drive another lorry. To say I was frightened would be a total understatement. I was panic-stricken. It was O.K. to practise in a field, but out on the open road! That was a different situation altogether. While "driving" to Knocklong, I was told that the railway bridge had been blown up the night before by the I.R.A. I was warned not to attempt to cross the railway sleepers that had been installed as a temporary measure. The warnings were totally unnecessary because I never reached the bridge or what was left of it. A hair-pin bend laid prior claims to me. This bend was a left-hander and the lorry only had a forty per cent left-hand lock. I jammed on the brakes, but nothing happened. I hit the ditch an unmerciful wallop and the piano went over my head into the adjoining field. Luckily, the piano was a Kramer Yacht Iron-framed job, with a folding keyboard and the only damage done was that it was knocked out of tune. So was I, need I add.

One day I visited Castleconnell, with my father and while he discussed fishing with Mr. Charles Enright, who was champion dry-fly caster of Ireland, I wandered along the riverside. Suddenly, a little boy fell into the river, and being a strong swimmer, I dived in and pulled him out. There was great excitement. His parents gave me a pound. I wonder what they would have given me if I left him to drown? I had to wear father's coat until my clothes dried out. When they did, eventually, they wouldn't fit me. They'd shrunk.

I always seemed to be attracted to water. When we were performing at Greystones, Co. Wicklow, my mother bought me a pair of grey slacks and a multi-coloured sports blazer. To give the new rig-out its first airing, I went fishing off the quay. As the boat from Bray came in, a young child fell into the harbour. His mother jumped in after him and they both went down between the boat and the quay wall. When they appeared on the other side of the boat, I found myself in the water. I don't really know whether I jumped in or was pushed. At any rate I held on to the woman and child until further help arrived. That afternoon the mother made her way up to the hall where we were playing and

told me that when her husband returned from Bray, he would visit me and recompense me for the damage to my suit. The dye had run out of the coat and decided to lodge in my trousers. Unfortunately, my trousers were reluctant to assimilate, so the whole clothing situation was quite a mess. I was delighted at the prospect of a new suit, but, of course, with my luck, the husband never turned up and neither did the new suit. I said to my mother that he must have taken me for an idiot and she agreed, adding that though he may have been mean, he was a good judge of character. I told my mother that when I died I wanted to be buried at sea but she said that there wasn't much hope of that because I was too good a swimmer.

As time went on, I became more and more involved in the family business, whether it was showing films or staging a variety show. Some Sundays my father would send my friend Freddy Fry and myself to some country village to show pictures with our old cinematograph. Incidentally, the old machine is now in a museum of movies in Hollywood, California. We had our own Tin Lizzie and screen. We didn't get the landlady's bed sheet, because the digs we stayed in did not have sheets on the beds. They were required as table cloths. The whole film apparatus was rather a crude effort. It was known as a dog-movement machine and it had no Maltese Cross to draw the film through the gate. You used your arm or leg to knock the film through, hence, the name dog-movement. There was also no bottom spool, so the film used to flow into a basket. Sometimes the film would appear on the ceiling and then switch to the hall walls and, at times, it actually hit our screen square on. Obviously, it was rather disconcerting for the audience but it certainly kept them alert and on their toes. As far as we were concerned three dimension meant ceiling, wall and screen. We had to carry two large cylinders of gas, oxygen and hydrogen and two pipes attached to a saturator of ether, which burned on a lime and shone through the gate—if you were lucky. We often found that when the audience had paid their money they would come in and sit down facing the machine. Nearing production time we would

inform them that they were facing the wrong way. When Freddy and I showed our first film, it very nearly became our last, as well. I turned on the gases too quickly and there was a terrific explosion. When we got into the hall, it was empty. The audience had vanished through the door and windows, and the windows were never built to be opened. But it's an ill-wind and there's nothing like a good explosion to draw a crowd. As Freddy so aptly put it "if we get all this crowd into the hall, it won't hold the half of them". They were sitting on one another's laps when we eventually started the show. It was an old Boer War movie. I turned the handle and Freddy lectured to them through a megaphone. The film was at its peak when the gas ran out. An awkward situation, but he explained that owing to the blood and carnage in the following scenes, we thought it wouldn't be right to continue, with so many women and children in the audience. We got away with it. We now ran a raffle for three cups and saucers, Freddy did his ventriloquist act and followed with his conjuring act, while I loaded the car. We then asked the audience to move out while we prepared the hall for a dance, charged those who wanted to come in sixpence and introduced the pre-arranged accordionist. We started the dance, paid the hall-man and were off home. Talk about Broadway Productions! The next morning, we paid the takings over to my father. He gave us ten shillings each for a job well done.

Even at this time I had become very street-wise. There's nothing to beat education through experience. Just try and rent a hall from a Parish Priest during Lent. My opening gambit usually was "I represent a Catholic touring company". On most occasions, I completed a full sentence through the fraction of the door, reluctantly opened to me. The odd time, I was successful.

We also worked the schools, where each child was charged three pence.

Father used to show all the latest films, like *Intolerance* and *The Birth of a Nation*. The serials *Pearl White*, *Dr. Fu-Manchu*, and *Tom Mix* were very popular. So were the Charlie Chaplin films and the Dempsey and Tunney boxing matches. Audiences,

in general, were very cheerful and happy. Indeed, at times, their tolerance level was unbelievable. I remember, in particular, a film called *In the Days of St. Patrick*, where in many a scene, clearly visible in the background, stood rows of telegraph poles. No one took any notice, or if they did, they never objected anyway. I thoroughly enjoyed this era of cine-variety.

But the Good Old Days did not last for ever. During the Black and Tan War, and the Civil War we suffered. We were ordered out of the North on account of my uncle running supplies to the boys in the Antrim Mountains. Many a time, during a show, the hall would be raided. The boys used to put their guns into the piano and, on one occasion, a fellow slipped a revolver into my mother's money bag at the door. My mother snapped "What are you doing?" He replied, "I thought the change would do me good".

One night during a raid for petrol in Drumshambo, the courthouse was set on fire. We happened to be showing pictures in it at that very time. All our belongings went up in smoke, including our lorry, parked outside. We were left in what we stood up in, but, I suppose, that was more than what we had when we came into the world.

Around this time an event happened which brought about major changes in the travelling-show business. It was a most tragic fire in Drumcollogher Co. Limerick. A film show was in progress in an upstairs loft when the projector went on fire. In the rush to escape dozens of young people were trampled and burned to death. As a direct result of his horrible happening, the authorities insisted that all travelling cinemas should have an iron box surrounding the projector. Also at hand would be required buckets of water and sand, as well as a wet blanket. Each hall should now possess two exit doors, opening outwards and two illuminated exit signs. All those regulations were stringently enforced by the Gardai and no show opened until the requirements were met.

When I was seventeen, I decided to leave home. I had an argument with my mother, as many a seventeen year old does,

and my grandmother advised me to try another show. In typical showbusiness dramatic fashion, I picked up my violin, left home and started walking. By the time I had covered ten miles, the pangs of hunger were beginning to attack. Every time I heard a car coming, I was sure it would be my father begging me to return to the fold. I had it even planned out what I'd say to him when he pulled up alongside me. But, as with the best laid schemes, I needn't have bothered. Like the father of the drowning child, he never came, and I continued on my hungry path into the wilderness. I passed a little village but I hadn't the nerve to do a busk. I hopped into a field, snagged a turnip and it tasted so good, I carried one away with me. At last I got a lift in a lorry into Kilkenny where I saw some bills advertising *Harry Lynton's Hippodrome*. I asked for a job there as a tentman. To my surprise, he took me on and asked no questions. Not that it would have made any difference even if he did. The show was in Kilkenny for the rest of the week and was doing wonderful business. He used to raffle cars, pianos, suites of furniture, bicycles, fur coats, ladies' stockings and underwear. You name it, he raffled it. He ran a variety show and I slept in the bell tent with the other tentmen. We had no cooking utensils and the men used a shovel as a frying pan. The frying procedure was firstly to stick the shovel in the sand, then in the river and then on the fire. We each threw our bit of steak, or sausage on the communal shovel and sat in a circle keeping close watch both on our neighbour and on the shovel. Heaven help the fellow who stuck his fork in my sausage. A gallon can was put on the fire and we all put a couple of spoonfuls of tea and sugar in it. When it boiled, we added the milk. This practice was called "drumming up". On top of this Cordon Bleu treatment, I was getting two quid a week from Lynton himself. Life was never better.

Promotion followed quickly enough. Soon I was a runner in gag scenes and was earning three pounds a week. From there I progressed to be part of the orchestra, where I played the violin. When we travelled, it was on trailers, because whenever we went up a steep hill, we had to jump off to put blocks of wood behind

the wheels. This was known as "chocking up". Everybody helped out in the erection of the tent. Without realising it at the time, this was wonderful training for me. I gained experience that would later prove invaluable when my father started his Circus.

As with all travelling shows, Harry Lynton's had it's hiccoughs too. One particular day the pros refused to handle the tent. There was no nonsense with Lynton, so he sacked them all. He turned to me, and I also refused, although I didn't really mind. This, of course, meant my sacking, as well. Most of the Company just melted away, leaving four of us, namely Stan and Marie Lawlor, Gaby Taylor, the comic, and myself. Stan advertised for a few more artists and soon, we were back in business with a new show. The additions were the Livingstone family, a drag act called Casey, who was a bit of a boozer, a pianist and a sister act. After about six months, Stan and Marie joined Ralph Sylvester's Pantomime Company and our travelling show, unfortunately, broke up.

Though I was still not eighteen years of age and only five foot, four and a half inches tall, I really felt like an old-timer in the world of Variety. Unemployed again, I joined my Uncle Bracey's Picture and Variety Show. I had a huge mop of fair curly hair and very blue eyes. I discovered that whenever I opened my eyes wide, the audience laughed. I didn't know whether they were laughing at me or at my violin playing, but one way or another, they obviously enjoyed my performance.

Uncle Bracey decided that his players looked rather rough diamonds on stage, so he went to a chuvey shop and bought a batch of dinner suits. At that time, no village in Ireland was complete without a chuvey or second-hand shop. Indeed, they're coming back again. These particular suits had very narrow trousers even though it was the era of the Oxford bags. However, beggars can't be choosers! I remember well that my trousers were for a man of over six feet in height, and when I pulled them up, I was literally blindfolded. A waistcoat would certainly have been an unnecessary expense. The suit coat went down below my knees, so my Uncle suggested cutting the bottom part

off, as the pocket area was not required. He was right, judging by what he paid me. When I walked on to play my solo, I really felt a bit stupid and looked it as well. At any rate, it gave the audience what it wanted, simply a reason to laugh. To make matters worse, my E-string broke, so I had no option but to tell a few gags. Again, without realising it just then, that night opened up a whole new career for me. I revelled in it. When the audience laughed at me I said "That's O.K., you can laugh at me. I laughed at you when you were coming in". I continued with, "You should have seen me when I was living", and so on. In no time, I had developed a ten-minute act, which became a nightly affair. Slowly, but surely, I built up a repertoire of gags, like "My mother used to play the piano on the Titanic. That went down well. Just before they hit the ice-berg, she ordered a whiskey on the rocks. After the crash she said "I just asked for ice, but this is ridiculous. My father met her in Blackpool, in the Tunnel of Love. She was digging it". I'd always finish up my act by starting to play a tune and then instead going ahead with another gag.

Bracey had six in the family, three sons and three daughters and most of them again married into the business. The day dawned when I decided it was time to leave my Uncle and family and return home. I had been home-sick for a while, so I said my goodbyes and returned, like the prodigal son. Whatever about the fatted calf, I was received with open arms by all my family. My arrival home coincided with a major change in my father's plans. The seeds of the Circus had been sown in his mind for a few years and were just coming to fruition when I returned home. Needless to say, many an obstacle lay in his way before his Circus seeds would be fully harvested.

ACT II

The Circus Comes to Town

My father always said that it was nineteen twenty-seven when the Circus idea first struck him. Some people said that it was a pity it didn't strike him harder. Father had been crippled with rheumatism for years, no doubt brought about by the number of days each year he spent standing in riverbeds, fly-fishing. Fishing which had started out as a hobby had, in later years, become his passion. Now he could walk only with the aid of a stick. However, his physical disability in no way detracted from his mental agility and his mind was wont to go on many an imaginative flight. He was a very practical man, too, so he just sat down and directed us in the art and craft of making a Circus.

He started with the king poles, then the quarter poles and finally, the side poles. We bought them all in their raw state, removed the bark, ringed and tipped them and put the tee irons on the king poles before painting them green. He then ordered the bellrings. We were sent to all the garages to collect half axles for stakes. Then he went to Belfast and bought what appeared to be a very good tent from Barry's Amusements. It hadn't been used for years and was dosed and mouldy. Unfortunately, we didn't find that out until our opening day. Next on the agenda were the horses. My father visited fair after fair until he had purchased an adequate selection. Some were good and others, well, I wouldn't like to have my last shilling on some of them. At one fair a dealer had six horses standing side by side. Father fancied the one in the middle. He must have had an excellent

Happy Circus Days.

eye for horseflesh because when the dealer took the chosen one out, the other five collapsed. If he had a fault, it was that he was too trusting. He was a wonderful artist and had an excellent pair of hands. We painted all the wagons and trucks with stars and stripes lettering and, why not, as my father's chosen title for his new Circus was Bailey's U.S.A. Circus. Big Jack McKenzie painted Cowboys and Indians on the Band Wagon and Advance Van. We were fast becoming a very colourful outfit. All the seating was constructed on schedule and two iron wheelrims went round the king poles to hold the flare lamps in case the electric lighting plant didn't work. Uncle Bobby trained a pony to nod its head for "Yes", shake its head for "No", and count numbers by pawing the ground with its hoof.

Now all that remained was for the real live acts to arrive.

The Hightwell Sisters did a Wild West Shooting Act. They fired at electric bulbs, which exploded by pressing a small device. They shot at candles, which went out, sometimes, before one of the sisters raised her gun. They wanted to use live ammunition but blowing holes in the tent wasn't exactly what we required.

Then came the Moxom brothers and their wives. One of the brothers introduced me into the world of acrobatics. He would lie on his back with his feet in the air, while playing the banjo. I would stand on his feet, playing the violin. Then he would throw me a back somersault and I'd land on my feet still playing the violin. In theory, that was. Any night he had a few drinks too many, I required a new violin, but they were cheap at the time.

Carl Otto, his wife Mary Fossett and their two sons Bobby and Jimmy also joined us. They provided acrobatics, horse-riding and clowning.

The number of acts was steadily growing. We acquired a strongman act, with a female partner, who wriggled around in a crocodile skin and a fellow, who called himself Aeroplane, did a trapeze act. Then came the Scott family, with two wagons, one for living quarters and one for the props. One of their wagons was drawn by a kicking mule and need I say that it was a doorless wagon. Reenie Scott taught me a trapeze act, where I finished up, playing the violin, hanging from my toes. Playing the Summit, in Howth, Dublin, I took a bad fall and was knocked unconscious. After the show, the little boys came to my father and enquired if I'd be buried in Howth.

However, before I deviate too far, let's go back to the opening night of *Bailey's U.S.A. Circus*. The scene was Askeaton, Co. Limerick. Ready for action we yoked up the horses to travel the few miles to the site. Scott lent his mule for one load but as there were no shafts, just a pole, my father suggested that I pull beside the mule and make sure I kept the lock straight. I can assure you it was a more welcome proposition than to be asked to sit behind the mule. They put a breastplate and a pair of traces on me and I was off. As we entered Askeaton, a bystander enquired of me if I was the Circus strongman. I was too exhausted to answer. We erected the tent in the middle of the town. The surface was very rough so we had to make a hole with a half-shaft for any wooden stakes or else tie down to the wheels of the wagons. There was a slight breeze blowing when we started to put up our tent. That didn't deter us. Soon it was up and

American flags were flying from the king pole. But as the work had progressed, so had the breeze. which, by now, could be termed a storm. As we admired our handiwork there came a rending of canvas and half our tent disappeared over the local butcher's shop. He wasn't at all pleased and neither were we. Necessity being the mother of invention, father bought some yards of heavy white material, tore it in strips and put the whole company to work stitching the tent together. By the end of the season there were so many patches in the tent that father pretended it was an advertising stunt and believe it or not, some people believed him!

On some occasions we only put the poles and wallings up, claiming that it was too hot. Entertainment was scarce, so the public didn't mind as long as they experienced a good show.

I was expected to learn everybody's act, which I more or less did.

In our second season we engaged Young Samson, a great showman who pulled tug-o-war against horses, allowed a motor-car, with four passengers run over his chest, defied strangulation with a rope round his neck and broke iron bars and six-inch nails. Some months later I was doing his act, billed as the Pocket Samson. Note, I didn't say, doing it as well, but doing it, at any rate.

My sister and I did an act called *Les Tigeras*, dressed in leopard skins. We finished our act with a sword fight, like a couple of Roman warriors.

Despite the many and varied outside influences on the show, our Circus was really a family show. We were involved in all aspects of the Circus life from erecting the tent to performing in the usual procession through a town or village. In the procession, my sister played the piano, as it bounced about on the moving bandwagon while mother played the big drum. Uncle Bobby played the trombone while I played the violin. Father oversaw the whole operation.

With all the hard work and exercise, I was becoming very fit and athletic. This, I suppose, stood to me in later life and helped

With sister Pat, as the Cyclonic Wonders 1927.

me endure the hardships abroad. From tent-erecting my hands were like leather and my arms like tree trunks. When I used the chest expander, I often offered five pounds to bystanders to do as I did. There was no shortage of takers. Big six-foot Civic Guards and broad-shouldered farmers used to have the hell of a

struggle just to open the expander. I also learnt how to drive a six-inch nail through a plank with my bare hand. The audience didn't notice the little piece of flannel on top of the nail and thus viewed me with the greatest esteem. Uncle Bobby had dyed his body with walnut dye, allowed his hair grow long and worked as an Indian. When the season ended, it took him ages to remove the dye but longer still to stop himself from uttering "Ugh! Ugh! " everytime he greeted somebody. Bert Duval wore a long wig, donned a moustache and beard and strolled around as Buffalo Bill. We had a young elephant which used to walk from town to town. Well, you know the speed of elephants. It always had to leave a day or two earlier than the remainder of the Circus. When it did what comes naturally in the middle of the road, it usually caused a great stir locally. You're talking about something in the shape of a panloaf, but of course, not sliced. I've often seen a group of farmers standing over it, poking it with their sticks and shaking their heads in bewilderment. Was it the droppings of a prehistoric animal, an extraterrestrial being, manna from heaven or what? No doubt it was food for thought in the local pub, until the true source was revealed. I suppose, indirectly, it was good advertising for the Circus.

Another interesting character who joined our Circus was Toby Wilders. He was a fighting man who carried fighting cocks and dogs with him. One of his favourites was a very old toothless lion and he used to put a wooden cage over it and charge the kids sixpence just to look at it. His mother-in-law used to walk the tightrope, but she very nearly came to a sticky end one night when she was tight and the rope wasn't.

Locals from miles around would bring their fighting cocks and fighting dogs to Toby's. If one of Toby's charges lost, he wasn't adverse to taking on challengers himself. All in all, I think, his bark was worse than his bite and the same could be said for his senile lion. We all knew that he used to knock-off the odd donkey to feed the lion. Soup, I suggested would be best for the poor toothless creature. He always buried the donkey skin. You could trace our Circus itinerary through the county of

Kerry by the trail of missing donkeys. I know he won't mind me mentioning all this because he's long since dead. Come to think of it, I don't feel too good myself either.

In the late 'Twenties, Circuses grew greatly in popularity. Business at the pay-kiosk was good and there were no transport problems. The horses did all the work. People were easy to please and all that was required was an advertising bill, here and there. You could even put a bill in the window of the Garda Barracks. There even came a time when the priest would advertise the Circus from the pulpit, during Sunday Mass.

A Whip and Rope Act from Belfast joined us on one occasion. He did the usual things like knocking a piece of paper out of a person's mouth and scaring the life out of the audience. At the evening performance we were using the four flare lamps and our whip act man flicked all four out of their rings and left the ring in total darkness. As the remainder of the show could not proceed, Father had to reluctantly refund entrance money. I'm not saying that the audience was dishonest but we paid out 20 more than we took in at the door, as everybody claimed they were in the dearest seats. I was in the caravan changing at the time. When I spoke to him later about his highly dangerous act, he rather abruptly told me that it was all part of his act and if he wasn't allowed to do it, then he had no act. I agreed with the latter part of his statement and sacked him there and then. Apparently I had acquired a little bit of authority and, by now, the Circus was totally in my blood, so, naturally, it came first and everybody and everything else played second fiddle.

I've always been amazed at the amount of humour to be found around the countryside. Our advance agent usually preceded the Circus by a few days. He travelled in a Model-T Ford to do the billing and announce the forthcoming attractions. Once, having lost his way, he went up a boreen to a country cottage where there appeared to be a large pool of water some yards in front of the cottage door. He decided to attempt to drive through it but very nearly drowned as the water turned out to be over five feet deep. When he escaped and complained to the cottage owner

With Uncle Bob, 1928.

about the lack of warning, the owner replied, "I'm most surprised at that. Sure it only goes halfway up on the ducks!"

We played Sligo during a bus strike. There was a lot of local animosity and the rioters had set fire to a bus. Then they turned their attention on the Circus. They ripped open the wallings of the tent and fighting broke out between the tentmen and the rioters. I found myself in the thick of it. My intention was to separate them but I was struck and knocked to the ground. Eventually, we beat them off, got the tent down and stored it away. As things had quietened down, Gaby Taylor, the two Otto boys and I decided to visit the next street for some fish and chips. Another bad decision. We soon had a group of fellows following us and a hail of stones preceded them. We ran and barely made the chip shop. Gaby had the sleeve of his coat ripped off as I dragged him inside. Luckily, the sleeve was empty. Gaby fired a couple of blanks from his prop revolver but that was only a

temporary safety measure. The shop owner phoned the Gardai who had to make a baton charge to clear the street. They then escorted us back to the circus field and the Sergeant inquired as to how soon we could leave town. I said, "Now!"

Such are the trials and tribulations of the travelling folk.

We wintered in Carlow that season and rented Jackson's Garage. Jackson was a racing driver who had gone broke and there were a lot of old cars in the garage, including a smashed-up Bugatti, which he had used himself. During the Winter, I rebuilt the Bugatti, taking parts from old Moons, Crossleys, Tin Lizzies and sports cars. I taxed it as a Salmson even though it had a straight-eight Bugatti engine. Bags of sand had to be put in the boot to keep it from being airborne. Going into Edgeworthstown on a Fair Day, the open exhaust frightened a few horses, and I was in trouble again. A Guard stopped me, looked at the car with Blue Bird written on the side, and took out his little book. In Court, he told the Justice that the car was taxed as a Salmson, had a Moon radiator, Bugatti eight-cylinder engine, no horn and the front and back number plates differed. I had backed into something and knocked a letter off the back plate. The Justice, to put it mildly, was intrigued. He asked to see the car, before he passed sentence. I explained that the car was only in its experimental stages. He inspected it, shook my hand, and congratulated me, but as there were ten offences listed against me, fined me ten shillings. There is a dormant racing-driver in all facets of society.

Tentmen are extraordinary individuals. They are usually named after the town they hail from. They live and die and nobody knows their surnames. I have fond memories of Limerick Jack, Tipperary Jim and Killala. I remember when they earned four shillings a day and their grub. They slept rough under a wagon or load, with their heads resting on horse-collars and their coats thrown over them. Many a morning I'd wake them and the frost had frozen their eyelids together. Killala would stand up, shake himself like a dog, roundup the horses, yoke them onto his load and off to the next town. Breakfast was not a priority.

Some of them were good drivers, but there were others who must have been descended from Ben Hur. Like Trinity College Freshmen, they had their rituals too. When a new tentman arrived at the Circus, the others would tie his kit to the top of the King Pole and hoist it up. It would remain there until the pull-down at the end of the night. An initiation ceremony on a par with any.

Years afterwards, some of them would call to my home in Malahide. The patter was usually the same, "Is himself in? A decent man, like his grandfather, ould Silvani before him. He told me that if I ever passed this way, I'd be sure of a handout". My wife would supply a few sandwiches and a few bob. When I'd return home I'd be informed, "One of your friends was here today, Harry". There was no need to say anymore. May those tentmen who have gone live in peace and those who remain, live in luxury. They deserve it.

Two important events took place in Ireland in 1932, namely, the Eucharistic Congress and the demise of *Bailey's U.S.A. Circus*. Our Circus had run for five years and that's a lifetime in showbusiness. On reflection, I played a major part in the decision to close down. At twenty three years of age, I was only receiving ten shillings a week pay which wasn't conducive to making me the most willing operative. There were outside influences too; the expense of a new tent; the opposition from foreign circuses; the cost of travel and winter-quarters and also my father's failing health. He was now permanently in a wheelchair and even though we sent him to Lourdes, he may have returned physically improved, but I still only received ten shillings a week.

Though we disbanded in Malahide in 1932, this was by no means the end of my Circus career. New vistas were appearing on the horizon, and, as "the old order changeth and yieldeth place to the new", the world of Drama was now coming to my fore.

ACT III

Dramatic Days

No sooner had the Circus closed but we were back in showbusiness running drama and variety under canvas. We travelled again, but this time not as far as before. Our shows went well and we prospered again. People cycled to our show and would travel from Howth to Rush. We put on the popular dramas of the day, namely, *The White Sister*, *The Colleen Bawn*, *Peg of My Heart*, *The Cat and the Canary*, *the Face at the Window*, *Sweeney Todd*, *The Barber*, *Lily of Killarney*, *The Wild Colonial Boy and The Boys of Wexford*. As the names indicate, there was something to please everybody, whether it was comedy, tragedy or history. The cast was made up of the Baileys, the Duvals, the McKenzies, the Bonos and the Taylors. Also included were Bob Ferguson, Dave Lewellan, Mrs Van Der Vire and Tommy Chambers.

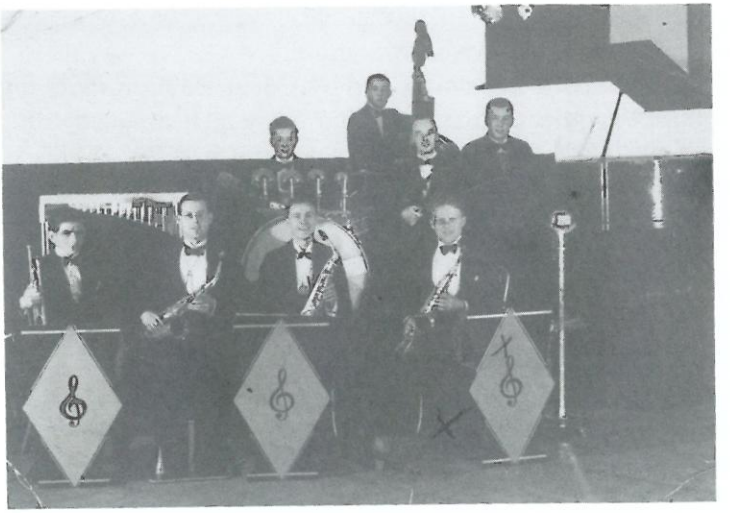
One morning, while playing Malahide, a small puppy ran into the tent. Soon a young lady, Bea Bissett, came looking for it. I think, for me, it was love at first sight. Not with the puppy, of course. I invited her to see the show and from there on, romance was in the air. I built myself a caravan trailer and we got married in 1934. My parents weren't happy with me marrying a "josser", which means somebody outside the business. Her parents weren't happy either as she had married a "trick of the loop", which was their term for somebody in showbusiness. We were married in Swords and went to Limerick for our honeymoon. A short time later we decided to go to England. I soon came to realise that

faraway fields are not always greener and, besides that, I was now married and unemployed.

One day in a pub—where else would you find one with my problems at the time—I saw a poster advertising a Fun Fair and Boxing Booth. I went along. Fifty bob if you went three rounds, a fiver, if you went five. I was very fit and fancied myself as a miniature Joe Louis. My opponent caught me one at the end of the first round and I genuinely saw stars. I hung on to him and whispered in his ear: "Give me a chance mate, I'm broke". He left me off the hook and I lasted the three rounds to collect my fifty bob.

Next morning, I decided to go to Luton to seek work at Vauxhall Motors. I noticed that many of the boxers were on the same train and with them, many of their challengers of the night before. Then I realised what a fix it was, but I can assure you I kept my new found information to myself. I spoke to the boxer I fought and he introduced me to his boss. He booked me for a week, pending my success with the Vauxhall job, which, incidentally, I didn't get. I went three rounds on Monday night and was invited back again to try my luck on Wednesday. I got a big reception from the Irish at the Fun Fair, so my opponent allowed me to fight a draw. Our rematch was arranged for peak time on the Saturday, when all the Irish turned up once more. My orders were to go down in the middle of the fourth round. I went down alright but got up again at the count of eight, hit my bewildered opponent with a left and followed up with a right cross. He went down and didn't get up. I was paid out my fiver, plus the money which was thrown into the ring and that was considerable, taking into account the Irish audience. I never felt that I had done anything wrong as I had suffered heavy punishment in three fights.

It wasn't a difficult decision for me to decide that my future didn't rest in the Boxing Booth. Interestingly enough, some time later I met Polly Faircloth, at The Queens, in Dublin. She used to fight in the Booths and take on all-comers. God help the drunk who thought he could beat her. She used to wallop her



Playing with Reg Millmans Band in Bedford 1937. With Sax., on front right.

opponents, no matter what size they were. Yet, out of the Boxing Booth, she was a lovely woman.

I moved to Bedford where I worked in various jobs. I painted houses, repaired taxis on the street and worked in a garage. I also had a job with Currys' Radios and my function was to collect the monthly instalments, insert radios and keep vans in order. It reminded me of that turnip I stole years before. Now I was being asked to get blood out of it. The people were so poor, I hadn't the heart to take instalments from them, so I often paid Currys myself. At the end, I couldn't afford to pay them any more, so they sacked me. Maybe that's what they call poetic justice.

My daughter, Patricia, was born in Bedford in 1938, one of my few happy memories of the place.

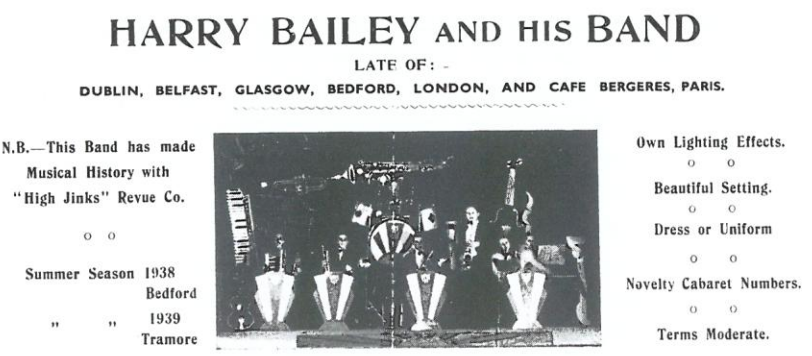
As war was looming and I didn't want to be conscripted, I returned to Ireland and made arrangements for my wife,

daughter and furniture to return. My mother-in-law kindly lent us a house near her own in Malahide.

On my return I was employed by Edgar Benyon, a wonderful showman who did a fortune-telling act which amazed the audience. Now that I was back in my natural habitat, things began to look up again. I got a contract with Fossett's Circus as Band Leader. Teddy Fossett asked me to take over the job as Tentmaster, as well, for which I received an extra couple of pounds a week. In 1940, we did a very successful tour of Ireland, but, no matter how clear and sunny the sky appears to be, there's always a cloud below the horizon. When I joined Fossetts, I brought with me, a wonderful sax player, called Jackie Walsh. It was late in the season when we played Bundoran. After the matinee, Jackie came running 'round the tent, chased by the knife-thrower, and he hid behind me for protection. "I'll stick him to the tent", said the knife-thrower. "You wouldn't take the skin off a rice pudding", I replied. He looked at me and decided that he couldn't. He complained to the boss, with the normal circus complaint: "Either he goes", meaning Jackie, "Or I go". Sax players were, apparently at the time, more readily available than knife-throwers, so Teddy sacked Jackie on the spot. I had no option but to leave with him as my father had taken him under his wing in Ballybay and promised his father that he'd always look after him. At that moment, I felt responsibility for Jackie's welfare.

After our sacking we wandered around the town of Bundoran, one of the most popular of seaside resorts in Ireland at that time. I approached local shopkeepers and offered my services to paint their signs. I got quite a few jobs The expertise acquired in England had come to my rescue. Then I noticed that Jim Jonson was running a show at the Hamilton Hall and got a job for Jackie and myself in the band. I also did a bit of stooging and gagging. Jim himself had to go to *The Gaiety* in Dublin to join Jimmy O'Dea's show, so he offered me a few more quid to play his comedy part.

My father died in Donegal hospital while I was playing in



Promotion was the name of the game.

Bundoran. I went to Limerick with the funeral. On the way down my mother asked me if I'd rejoin them after the Bundoran job. In the circumstances, I agreed and so, it was back to the old grindstone again. Travelling with my mother's show, I lived in a belltent so that I could send as much money as possible home to my wife and daughter.

While playing Tramore I met up with Phil Murtagh, who was playing *The Atlantic Ballroom* and he invited me to stay with him and his band in a bungalow they had rented. Thank God for small mercies and a decent bed. Phil asked me to contact him should I ever go to Dublin and I promised that I would.

We were playing a little town in Waterford when my mother found out that my youngest sister Beenie had married Ben Bono. That day, all hell was let loose and my uncle Bobby threatened to shoot Bono. I tried to pacify the situation but my mother warned me that if I took their part, I could leave with them. I said, "That suits me fine", and she sacked me. It was the last straw with my own mother sacking me. I was getting used to being fired for supporting other people's causes. Bono and Beenie left and went to Dublin. I returned to my boarding house and met up with a lorry driver and his mate who were having

tea there. They had delivered a tombstone at the nearby cemetery and offered me a lift to Dublin in the back of their lorry. I had to leave the contents of my suitcase as payment for my digs. We arrived in Dublin at 3 a.m. and I was almost as stiff and cold as their original cargo. I walked the nine miles from Dublin to Malahide and arrived home at 8 a.m. At least my wife was delighted to see me.

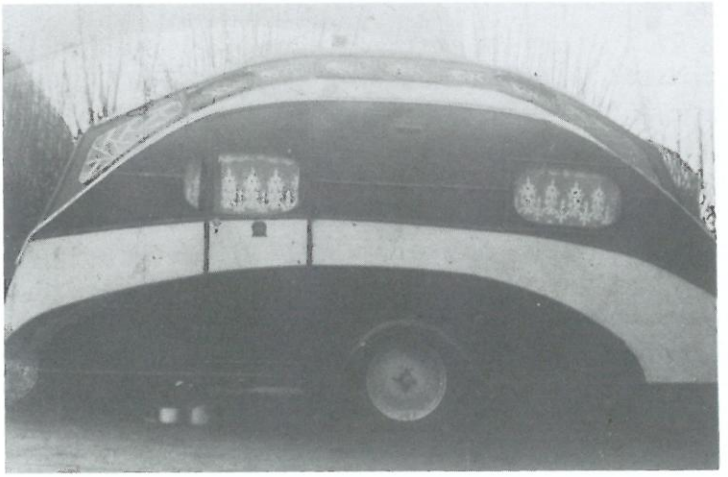
Things were bad and I was broke. I arranged to meet Phil Murtagh at *The Metropole* and we went on a job search. Paddy Gogan, the manager of *The Queens* was quite nice but didn't require an act. I tried *The Olympia* but there was nothing doing. I carried Victor Mara's bag to the station. He was a booker for *The Hippodrome*, Belfast. Job chances here, I thought. He was most polite, but didn't even give me a tip for carrying his bag. I went to see Louis Elliman at *The Royal* but nothing definite came from that either. I finished up my weary search in the Musicians Club and slept there that night, with their permission. I did not have the fare home. It was raining heavily and I didn't have the enthusiasm for another nine mile walk.

The next day the Transport Band, whose headquarters were in the Musicians Club, had an engagement at *Radio Eireann*. The leader gave me a uniform and, need I add, I had to turn up the pants and sleeves of the coat. He put an euphonium in my hand and said "Just pretend to blow". We marched to the studio and they played for half an hour while I, well you know, pretended to blow. Then we marched back to the Club, where the band leader paid me three pounds. A great bunch of lads they were. For the first time I realised that there's money in keeping one's mouth shut.

Phil Murtagh gave me an order to make a set of music stands and he liked them so much, he persuaded other bands to do the same. It was all grist to the mill and every little helped.

Variety started at *The Rotunda* and I got a week's engagement with three shows a day. I did two acts, one with the fiddle and the other with the sax. I did a patter act with the sax and finished playing *South of the Border*, which was very popular then. On

the fiddle, I finished with *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square*. They were both in E-flat. The reason I mention this is because



Touring Home, I built for myself 1940.

the pianist was a bit deaf and this caused a few problems. He sat at an upright piano and he could not see as he was too busy reading the music. My usual gimmick was to go to play the sax but sing instead. I sang *South of the Border* and he played *A Nightingale Sang*. It was in E-flat of course. Then I knew he was deaf in both ears. When I did the fiddle act, I flashed him the fiddle. He smiled and nodded. I thought he understood me but no. Maybe his sight wasn't the greatest either. He now played *South of the Border* while I played *Berkeley Square*. At the matinees, it made no difference as the kids howled and pelted me with orange peels. The occasional section of orange peel would land in the sax bell, so I learned fairly quickly to keep moving on stage. A moving target is a greater test of kids' accuracy.

The evening shows were good and appreciated by a receptive audience. The pianist and myself sorted out our problems and

we both went *South of the Border* at the same time. I remember that week well. I called myself Herbie Mallow, just in case I flopped.

Ben Bono got a week at *The Queens*, recommended me, and some weeks later, they booked me. All I had got at T*he Rotunda* was a fiver, so my sax was in and out of the pawn shop on a regular basis. When I opened at T*he Queens*, Phil Murtagh lent me a sax and a white coat. I went down like a bomb and got ten pounds for my efforts. Well, to be exact, I got nine pounds. One pound was stopped for Maurice Elliman, who was the Liverpool agent for *The Queens*, and an uncle of Louis Elliman.

My next engagement was *The Royal*. Here I did a double act, with my sister Beenie. It went very well, but didn't kill them. The scriptwriter for *The Queens' Theatre*, Ernie Murray wrote a show for me called *Dublin Laughs*. I rehearsed it for a fortnight and when it went on, it proved to be a mighty success which ran for three months to everybody's delight. That was when I first met Paddy Tyrrell, who was my feeder or straightman. Rick Bourke was the stage manager, who later became a great friend of mine. Alex Fryer was in charge of the orchestra when I was next booked for Panto. The cast consisted of Miss Eire O'Reilly, principal boy, Mick Eustace, Paddy Tyrrell, Bill Brady, Josephine O'Hagan, Patty Ryan, Willie Hobbs and Dolly Sparkes, not forgetting, of course, The Queens' Moonbeams. During our long run at *The Queens*, I walked through the audience one night linking arms with Lord Mayor, Alfie Byrne. This brought great applause.

When the Panto finished, I was offered a Sunday night at *The Royal*. Jimmy Campbell conducted and I had acquired another life-long friend.

My next show was *Broadway to Connemara*, at *The Queens*. Another success. I was beginning to get worried as things were just going too well. So well, in fact, that George Black from *The London Palladium* came over to book me. However, he chose Charlie Byrne instead. He did book me some years later for *The Opera House*, Blackpool.

I decided to take the *Broadway to Connemara* show on tour and booked a Galway tenor who had just returned from Rome where he was having his voice trained. He was a little cross-eyed and I suppose I should have adhered to my mother's advice or superstitions. According to her, one should never hire a cross-eyed actor, never have a tin trunk in a dressingroom or never whistle in a dressingroom. If you put your socks on inside out, leave them that way. She proved prophetic as regards our tenor. While performing at *The Cork Opera House*, he walked onto the stage with his dress-suit trousers rolled up and in a pair of brown boots. If I had seen him in time, I wouldn't have allowed him on. He started to sing and the audience thought it was some kind of gimmick until he staggered off. It was an unfortunate mistake and you know what the Cork Press are like. He promised, on his mother's grave, that it would never happen again. "Gullible" should have been my second name.

Our next stop was in Carlow. Our first night at *The Ritz* he started to sing *On with the Motley* and when he came to the line "I am not a man, ha-ha", he fell on his knees and could not stop laughing. The audience laughed too, but I'm afraid that it was at him and not with him that their laughter was aimed. Paddy Tyrrell pulled the runners but they were behind him, so I had to drag him off by the collar and then finish the song myself. At least some of the audience thought it was a comedy act. When I got off stage myself, I was informed that our Galway tenor had to be thrown out as he was looking for a fight. I went outside to find him singing to the queue, lining up for the second house. When he saw me, he ran. Just as well. I had to go back inside and rearrange the show. The Manager of *The Ritz* soon informed me that our runaway had thrown a big stone through the plate glass doors of the cinema. I wondered how many resurrections had his mother had. The next day he returned as if nothing had happened and offered me a pair of cufflinks as a peace offering. I had to be restrained. So ends the saga of the cross-eyed tenor.

After my Irish Tour, I arrived back at *The Royal*. Louis Elliman gave me a few weeks work and suggested a new show,

which would guarantee me twelve pounds per week and six months work. I accepted, came up with a show called *Hullabaloo*, but I think, success had gone to my head, without touching my brain. My mistake soon became evident. I couldn't cope with the acting, organisation, administration and expenses. I had to do five spots a night, three shows a day and supply scripts. I informed Louis, that as much as I liked working for him, I'd have to leave. He offered me 50 a week, which I accepted and after a repeat episode of complaint and new offer, I ended up on 100 a week. I thought I'd never see a poor day again. They say that money is the root of all evil. For me, at that time, it seemed to be able to sort all problems.

Around this time, I met up with Richard Hayward and we toured the North of Ireland, where he owned three cinemas.

My life was becoming highly organised and I used to take a company on tour for five or six months each year. While on tour, I'd prepare gags and sketches for *The Royal*. While on a visit to Waterford, I met a young man, named Hal Roach, who won a competition as a boy soprano. His prize was five pounds and a week with us in the next town, which he readily accepted. He was fifteen years old then and I remember that he fell in love with Mary Hughes, of a song and dance act, and married her, sometime later, of course.

When I recall all the marriages that resulted from my show: Paddy Tyrrell and Eileen Clifford; Paddy Jesson and May Farrelly; Martin Crosby and Thelma Ramsey. I often wondered whether I was running a roadshow or a marriage bureau.

Its funny the way some particular events stick in your mind. During a Christmas Pantomime at *The Queens*, the near right-hand box was full every night by the same group of men. When Saturday night came, they threw flowers and boxes of chocolates onto the stage. I was sharing top billing with Eire O'Reilly at the time. I picked up the gifts and asked her to distribute them while I was making the curtain speech. I nearly collapsed when she informed me that the presents were mostly for me. When the curtain fell, I dashed up the stairs to ask the donors if they

With Jack Cruise and Noel Purcell, doing a "take-off" of the Andrew Sisters 1942.

thought I was gay. Immediately I entered the box, two of them threw their arms about me and kissed me on both cheeks. One of them informed me that he was the First Officer and Doctor from a Greek ship and the only one of the party who could speak English. I invited them to my dressingroom where I learnt that their ship was docked in Dublin with a cargo of sulphates awaiting to go to Belfast to be armed for the war. One had a parcel, wrapped in newspaper, under his arm. It transpired that it contained ten thousand pounds and they were afraid to leave it on the ship. I arranged to meet them the next day. The Captain and First Officer turned up, and we dined at the Gresham. I invited them for dinner at my home on the next Sunday. They said that they would have to buy new suits, so I took them into a shop where they purchased three suits, including one for me. Such are

the hidden benefits of broken English. I picked a brown suit and they did likewise. What could I say? They also bought three pairs of shoes and three hats. Yes, you guessed it, the same shape and colour. We looked like the Marx brothers when we left the shop. I was a bit embarrassed but "you can't look a gift horse in the mouth". They arrived by taxi for Sunday lunch, accompanied by two ladies of a profession older than acting. They brought two gold crosses and chains for my little daughters. A good time was had by all, including my wife, when she recovered from her initial shock. In return they invited us for a meal on board their ship. It was an experience, I can assure you. All the plates were laid out on the table, one on top of the other. I had five plates in front of me. They looked as if they hadn't been cleared up from the previous meal. This set-up was certainly Greek to me. We had lobster and salad for starters. I thought this was the main course and ate almost a whole lobster. Next came some beautiful fish and french fries. I was too embarrassed to enquire what kind of fish it was, just in case it wasn't fish at all. Three lamb chops came next, followed by a huge steak and we finished off, or were finished off by pears, ice-cream and coffee. Red and white wine flowed like the Liffey underneath, but with a much sweeter odour and taste. After a brandy and cigar, I could have swam or maybe floated to Athens. I could fully understand now why the Greeks started the Olympics. They need the exercise to be fit for their next meal. I congratulated the Captain on the excellence of the cuisine and he asked me to repeat my comments in front of their Chef, who was delighted and bowed his way out. They eventually sailed for Belfast and I never heard from them again.

While I'm on the subject of food, I recall Dooley's Eating House in Ballingarry, Co. Limerick. There was a sign over the door which read: "We ate you. Or you can ate yourself". This meant that the landlady would make your meals if you supplied the grub. On fair days she erected a table in the middle of the diningroom, and it was no ordinary table. Two doors were nailed together and placed on three tressels. She boiled about four stone of spuds and put them in the centre on a beautifully laundered

cloth made of flour bags. About ten pounds of Chinese or yellow bacon came next, followed by heaps of cabbage and four pounds of butter. Salt lay in saucers all over the place and all this for two shillings a man. Today, Dooley's would win prizes in both the good food and much food guides. It cost one shilling and sixpence to stay overnight. She knew everybody at the table and showed no surprise at the speed her food stocks disappeared.

In the early 'Forties, I worked a lot with Jimmy Campbell. We used to always argue on stage. The audience thought we hated each other and they loved it. Occasionally I used to dress as a lady member of his orchestra and keep coming in with a sour note on the cello. We played our practical jokes too. On one occasion he put a press stud on my seat and I must have jumped three feet in the air. In retaliation, I got a box of black boot polish, put some on both hands, walked up to him as he finished his overture and patted him on both cheeks saying "Simply marvellous". When he faced the orchestra, he had no idea as to why they collapsed laughing. I said: "I hear you're joining the Black and White Minstrels". He didn't get the joke until he looked in the mirror after the show.

The Royal days were certainly that. Bob Hope asked me to supply him with a few local gags, which I did. After his performance, one press critic suggested that Bob's local gags should be a lesson to all local comedians. You can't win them all! I remember when "It's the way I tell 'em" first came down from Belfast. Everything he cracked had already been worked and he got a poor reception. I took him aside, warned him what gags not to crack, gave him a couple of local ones and he went very well for the rest of the week.

From 1940 onwards, though *The Royal* was literally my home, I kept going on tour as it always provided the opportunity of acquiring fresh material. When I worked Belfast, Jimmy O'Dea was in *The Hippodrome*. He invited me on stage to do a few gags and, as a result, I was invited back to do my own show. Topping my show with me were Jack Doyle and Movita. When we opened, Jack had a row with Movita and wouldn't walk down

With Jimmy Campbell, Royal Band Leader 1943.

in the finale which consisted of a big army set-up. He was dressed as a Guards Officer as were Alfred O'Shea and Martin Crosby. The Royalettes from Dublin were dressed as Wrens. May Devitt was seated on a rostrum as Rule Britannia. I walked down backwards, dressed as Churchill, with a large V fixed on my back and smoking a cigar. Then I turned and gave the audience the two finger sign, but not the Harvey Smith one, of course. They enjoyed it. After the show as I walked out into the blackout, I was cornered by two Belfast men. They informed me in no uncertain terms that if Jack Doyle didn't participate in the finale "for King and Country" they would stop the show. The next day I received a bullet in an envelope, telling me that the next bullet would be delivered by revolver if Jack didn't play his part. The next night Jack did come down and the second bullet never materialised—thanks be to God.

We went on to do a cabaret in Belfast City Hall, which was packed like a sardine tin. The audience wanted Jack and they got him. Some shouted: "Why are you not fighting for King and Country?". Jack studied them for a few seconds, walked to the back of the stage, turned and said' "I'll tell you why". Then, with a running jump, he landed on top of the hecklers and they went down like ninepins. The M.P.'s and P.A.'s arrived and saved his life.

I was playing *The Royal* the week Dublin was bombed. A small creamery in Campile, Co. Wexford was also bombed and a number of girls were killed. I wrote a little monologue about the incident, which nearly caused a major controversy. I'll give it to you as I remember it:

It hovered high above them, over the village of Campile
And the people looking upwards, greeted Jerry with a smile.
They waved their hands in token, the sight looked grand to some
But Hitler or Hell's Angels simply answered with a bomb.
In that quaint old Irish village, with its colleens sweet and fair,
Lie bleeding battered bodies, and their old folk weeping there.
Sure, they'll say they thought 'twas London, with all its smoke and grime

But I'll tell you what I call it—A dirty Nazi Crime.
I'm but a simple comic, I don't wish to be sublime
But it might have been your mother, your sweetheart, aye, or mine.

The German Ambassador and some of his friends came to *The Royal*, some people say, just to hear the monologue. At any rate, when I was halfway through it, they showed their protest by walking out. A short time later, I received a letter from the Ambassador telling me what would happen to me when Hitler won the war. History saved me. I framed the letter, but, unfortunately, some halfwit stole it one night during a party in my home.

However, the theatre alone doesn't have sole claim to humourous situations. A good friend of mine in Malahide is retired Garda Sergeant P. G. O'Brien. I remember when our paths first crossed. He was stationed as a Garda in a little country village where we were performing. At three o'clock in the morning we were drinking in a pub when Garda O'Brien walked in. Turning on the owner, he said: "I've already warned you twice, once before. Now you're in trouble", taking out his notebook. The pub owner replied "Alright, O'Brien, go ahead, but I hope you realise that the only reason we're here at this hour is to make arrangements for our Lourdes trip. It's even been requested that we'd say a novena for yourself and the good lady". The Guard was taken back because I think, at the time, he was trying to stay off the drink himself. So, putting his book back in his pocket, he emphasised that this occasion was most definitely the last chance that the publican would ever receive, and he turned to leave. As he opened the door, he was struck on the nose by a pair of knuckles which belonged to a thirsty customer about to give the pre-arranged number of taps. O'Brien, with tongue in cheek, says: "I suppose you're also about to go to Lourdes"? "No", replied the potential customer, "I was about to go to Knock".

There were some great acts travelling the country, during the war years. Richard Hayward rang me one day and asked if I

could do something for a friend of his, Alfred O'Shea, who was stuck in Belfast on account of the war. I told him to send him along. At the time we were playing *The Palladium*, no, not in London, but in Rush, Co. Dublin. It was Monday and we happened to be unloading the lorry when Alfred arrived. He was immaculately dressed, carried a large suitcase and a brief case and as he alighted from his taxi, he requested a porter for his suitcase. Four of us were about to carry the piano into the cinema, so I turned to Paddy Tyrrell and said: "You, Paddy, carry his case and you, Mr. O'Shea, grab the end of the piano". Shock therapy it's called, and it worked. Totally surprised he took the end of the piano and thus was initiated into the fit-ups. He was a great asset to our show and certainly added a touch of class. Not alone did he sing beautifully in English, but in Italian and German as well.

At the same time we had a magician from Belfast also. He had lost the bottom of his right leg in a youthful accident and wore an artificial replacement from about four inches above his ankle. During his act on opening night in Rush, the replacement loosened and he realised that he wouldn't be able to walk off stage. Being the trooper he was, he turned to the audience and said: "I'm now going to do my disappearing foot trick, Abrakebabra, Abrakebree!. My foot will vanish, as you will see". He kicked his artificial limb backwards very quickly and when he put it down on the stage, the foot was missing. The audience were amazed and to tumultuous applause, I pulled the centre runners.

Another artist recommended by Richard was Billy McComb, an amateur magician from Queens University, Belfast. He told me that if I acquired a coffin, he would saw his girlfriend in half. Incidentally, his girlfriend was a Belfast Beauty Queen. During the war foreign timber was very scarce and, eventually I got a local carpenter to make the coffin out of heavy Irish timber. He did his act alright during the summer season but then had to return to University. Needless to say, he left without paying for the coffin, so I decided to play a joke on him. I filled the coffin

with rocks, nailed the lid on, and sent it by rail to his mother's up-market restaurant in Royal Avenue, Belfast, C.O.D., naturally. I was later informed that when it arrived, it took four men to unload it from both train and lorry. When his mother opened it, among the rocks, she found a brief note, which read, "That shook you!" I've often wondered if my joke was appreciated.

Programme Review with Noel Purcell, Paddy Dunlea and Jack Cruise 1945.

However, it's too late now anyway, to do anything about it, unless of course, I could retrieve the coffin. Funerals are so dear today, that every little helps.

Financially, I was beginning to succeed but I was never a great manager of money. I was a sleeping partner in four cinemas in the North but, after initial success, they finally collapsed and when I woke up, my hopes of an income when my stage days would be over had also collapsed. Belfast was fairly rough at the time. One Sunday, I walked into a club in the hope of collecting

a bit of gossip for my show. I put my hat on a seat and when I returned with my drink from the bar, my seat was occupied. The occupier had no intention of relinquishing the seat and I had no intentions of appearing at *The Hippodrome*, minus my front teeth. Two very small pale-faced fellows at the next table sorted the situation out. They even got me an apology. They knew me and introduced themselves. One was Rinty Monahan and the other, his brother-in-law Bunty Doran. Thank God for small mercies.

1946 had arrived and wander-lust was beginning to creep into my bones again. Harbour Lights were calling and so it was good-bye to the heady days of *The Queens* and *The Royal*. I felt that my future lay further afield and that bigger island, across the pond, was calling to me.

ACT IV

In Foreign Fields

"Fools rush in", they say and they could have added, "And Harry Bailey soon follows". My first few months in London proved to be rather uneventful and my money and myself were fast becoming distant relatives. One day I was in my usual pub in Regent Street when Mr. Sharman, Producer of *Saturday Night Music Hall*, rushed in, "You say you are a comic!" he says, "Now's your time to prove it. I'm putting you on tonight. My comic has taken ill". Now I understood what was meant by an "ill-wind". I was dumb-founded and answered "I can't go on. I haven't got my fiddle. It's with my luggage in Euston Station". I had intended going home on the night train. He insisted, agreed to put me on first, borrowed a fiddle from the orchestra leader, Ray Jenkins and guaranteed me a taxi to Euston Station. I went on in a trance and I remember saying, "It gives me great pleasure to stand up here tonight and play for you. In fact, on your rations, it gives me great pleasure to stand up". This went down well, as everybody had ration cards in England in 1946. Even if I say so myself, I did a good performance that night, in *The Paris Cafe*, Regent Street. It was a radio show and had some unexpected repercussions.

I caught the night train to Hollyhead, feeling quite pleased with myself, and arrived in Malahide early next morning. I reached home the same time as the local Gardai who informed me that I wasn't to unpack but to take the boat to Liverpool and open at *The Pavilion Theatre*, with John B. Robertson's Revue.

He had heard *The Paris Cafe Radio Show* and was impressed. The second thing I did was to take the Gardai' advice.

When I arrived in Liverpool, I found that Mr. Robertson had me billed as *The Irish Comic Star*. It was just a hand painted poster in front of the theatre. He hadn't had time to get a new poster printed, but, to me, graffiti would have sufficed. Having been out of work for so long, the two years I spent with the Robertson Revue were a much needed tonic. I now had an agent in London and the sun was shining again.

One day in London, I met Noel Purcell. He had come over from Dublin to make the film *Captain Boycott*. He brought me along to Pinewood Studios and introduced me to the film Director, who asked me to play the part of a bookie in the film. It was only a small part, but I gladly accepted it. I was paid forty pounds for my brief appearance, which was the equivalent of a week's pay. Noel has gone to that bigger stage in the sky and I often say a prayer for him. No doubt he is still making them laugh up there.

I suppose one has gained a certain measure of status when invitations to do charity shows start to arrive. The Viscountess Mountbatten of Burma invited me to do a charity show in *The Stoll Theatre*, Kingsway, in aid of the General Hospital, Shaare Zedek, Jerusalem. A month later, Viscount Rothermere asked me to do a charity for the Caxton Convalescent Home. I was certainly moving in the right circles now. In a little time I could see myself operating in a different type of theatre.

I toured with Robertson in a show called *Irish and Proud of it*. I was so well established that I got Ben Bono and Beenie onto the show and we were all very happy for a while, even though we were only playing third and fourth-class theatres. Then we came to play *The Metropolitan Theatre* in Edgware Road, London. Robertson decided he would now have to book recognised acts to draw the crowds so he laid off three acts for two weeks. Ben Bono was one of these and he was very annoyed, especially as he had bought a new suit for his London opening. Billing wasn't announced until the last moment, so utter confusion was

the result. Ben was determined to go on. I was compere, and had to restrain him. The top of the bill's husband was conducting the orchestra and when I introduced his wife to the audience, he didn't like the way I did it and told me so in the rudest of ways. My toleration level would never have won prizes so I caught him by his dress-suit lapels. He escaped, locked himself in his dressingroom and took massive persuasion to start the second house. To add to the unpleasant atmosphere, the stage manager, who incidentally was an ex-army P.T. instructor, passed some remark to me about being "Irish and Proud of it". You've heard about a red cloth and a bull. I floored him. The theatre manager said that in all his days in showbusiness he had never seen the likes of that particular night. He must have had little knowledge of the Irish in Edgware Road. I must add that the show's title didn't help. However, it fizzled out eventually and I successfully played *The Met.* many a time afterwards.

In my travelling days, I was often my own worst enemy. Maybe it was being away from home so much! Playing the workingmen's clubs, I recall the occasional bout of fisticuffs with members of the audience. Maybe it was the fact that I had so much spare time! I feel that I was always over-eager to meet any challenge. At times I forgot that I was there to entertain the audience, not to educate them. Maybe I drank too much! I have never really sorted out why so often I found myself in the thick of problems. Maybe, it's because I'm Irish!.

While touring with J. B. Robertson, I received the news that my mother was ill. I travelled to Ireland on a Sunday, visited her and found her extremely weak. She whispered that she was delighted to see me and would now die happy. Dr. Boucher-Hayes informed me that she wouldn't last a week. I regretted that I had to return to England the same evening. She died the next weekend. I returned to Dublin and travelled with the funeral as far as Naas. There I said my goodbyes to the family and watched them proceed on their sad journey to Limerick. I opened in Liverpool the same evening. Such is one of the pressures of showbusiness. If you're topping the bill, only your own death is

an acceptable excuse for absence. You can die on the stage a few times, but off stage you can die only once. "The show must go on" is the catchword of theatrical management.

Whenever I think of my mother, one particular incident always comes to mind. When I was about twelve years of age, I was getting extremely tired of playing Little Willie in *East Lynne*, so I mounted a campaign of revolt. My mother played the part of Lady Isobel Carlyle. In the final death scene, mother always had the audience in tears. She was, of course, disguised as Madame Vaine and in answer to my plea: "Will it be long before I die, Madame Vaine?" she would sob, in her own inimitable broken-hearted way: "Don't talk about dying". It was, or should have been, a heart-rending scene. On the night I chose to mount my revolution, I strode on stage in a pair of hob-nailed boots and dressed in a long night-shirt. In the roughest voice I could muster, devoid of emotion, I barked: "Will it be long before I die, Madame Vaine?" In a shocked tone, my mother whispered in my ear: "No it won't, if you don't get them bloody boots off and into bed". She accentuated her request by giving me a smack across the face. Amid the laughter of the audience she continued: "Dead, dead and never called me mother". Looking up, she said:"Oh! Jesus, what have I done to deserve this?", and got a big hand from the local audience. A voice from the back of the hall, shouted: "Give him a hiding, Carrie". From that day onwards, my mother always got a local kid to play Little Willie. Thank God for memories, both happy and sad.

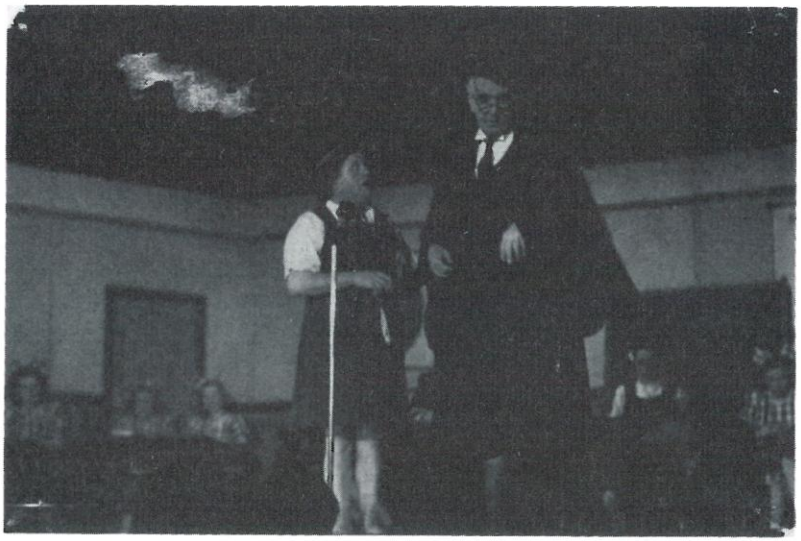
The next time I played *The Metropole in* Edgware Road, I had another adventure. When I arrived I met a former stage hand and dresser named Mick Roche. He said that he was down in his luck, so I engaged him as my dresser. At the end of my two weeks, I gave him three jobs to do. Firstly, to carry my saxophone to a music shop in Shaftesbury Avenue to be repadded, then onto a laundry with a suitcase full of clothes and finally to take my typewriter to a typewriting firm to be mended. He never returned that evening, nor did I see him again for two years. I reported it to the Police and later they informed me that

he had been arrested for burglary and confessed to the stealing of my sax and typewriter, but wouldn't say how he had disposed of them. He was sentenced to two years. When he came out of prison, I was playing in a theatre in London. He arrived backstage and said that he was sorry. He had used the laundry but he had the addresses of both the buyers of the sax and the typewriter. He needed two quid badly but would give me both addresses in return for a loan. Like an idiot, I gave him the money and received two non-existent addresses. I had been caught again. I always fell for hard-luck stories. Mick, if you're out there, you won't catch me a third time, I think.

At the end of '47, I finished with J. B. Robertson, or maybe, he finished with me. I now began to play the second and third-rate theatres. At *The Palace*, Blackpool, I played with Bob and Alf Pearson, Winifred Atwell and Jackie Coogan. Jackie used to play the kid in the Charlie Chaplin pictures. One day I played golf with him. I didn't recognise him when he turned up at the Golf Links. He was entirely bald. He could see I was surprised and said: "Don't worry Harry, it's my own hair. I comb it every night before I put it on". Frank Randle was a top comic then. When he walked on stage, he always took his false teeth out, top and bottom, put them on a tray and they were carried off stage by a pageboy.

Nearing the end of the 'Forties, I was up and down the country in England, like a yoyo. In Southport, I played with Lita Rosa and Dickie Valentine, and Frank O'Donovan. I played *The Alexandra Palace* in the first Irish show to be televised. This was an unforgettable experience. At *The Empire*, Glasgow, I met up with Andy Stewart, Harry Lauder, Guy Mitchell, Frankie Laine and Slim Whitman. Those were the days!

It's funny how some theatres come easily to mind, while others, no doubt, I've long forgotten. One that lives in my memory is *The Empire*, Glasgow. I was top of the bill in a Strip Show called *The Follies Bergeres*. This didn't mean of course, that I appeared in the nude, and my fiddle always wore a G-string. The show was produced by Paul Raymond, the London Striptease



With Noel Purcell, Theatre Royal 1949.

expert. I had been touring with the show for ten months and, as it was financially successful, Moss Empires decided to put it into their theatres. When I heard that we were going to appear in Glasgow, I went to the Moss directors, Cissie Williams and Ted Gollup, and suggested that they were making a grave mistake. I was informed that I was hypersensitive and worried too much. So Ted came to Glasgow and after opening night, said: "There, I told you Harry. It went well. There's nothing to worry about". He left Glasgow on Friday morning to return to London.

True to my forecast, the scene changed on Friday night. The audience were very quiet, too quiet, in fact. During the piano act, somebody threw an ice-cream and it hit the pianist in the face. He stopped, protested, and was hit by a half dozen more, of varying flavours. The pianist was certainly the cream of the show that night. The next scene was a nude scene and the audience started throwing pennies. In Scotland, throwing pennies, I

hear you say! Please believe me, it was true. The orchestra was forced to leave the pit. Pennies from heaven maybe O.K., but from the back row of the theatre, that's a different story. When the supply of pennies became exhausted, bottles began to fly. Empty, of course. A Scotsman may be angry but he's no fool when it comes to drinking. The stage manager asked me to go on and see if I could quell the disturbance. I walked on with a white hankie tied to the fiddle bow and wearing a fireman's helmet. The audience laughed and relaxed. I was on for ten minutes, while they were trying to get the orchestra back in the pit. Only our own conductor, who played piano, volunteered.

The show started again and so did the booing. I was asked to mediate once more. I didn't want to, but couldn't refuse or I'd probably be sacked, which, by the way, at that moment looked a more attractive proposition than returning on stage. However, the show must go on and so did I. I was met by a sea of silent faces and then the hissing began. I tried to gag my way through, starting: "Quiet please, can't you hear the gas leaking?" I even told them the story about the snake who went home crying to his mother: "Mammy the other snakes won't let me hiss in their pit". She replied with: "Would you credit it. I remember when they hadn't a pit to hiss in".

While I was on stage, the pianist received a note telling him to play the *National Anthem*. He was only too willing and I must say that I didn't stand to attention for too long. The audience were caught unexpectedly and the curtain came down. For the first and only time in my whole life, I was out of the theatre before the audience.

The next night, Saturday, the Police were at the theatre and they closed down the balcony. The show was received in stony silence but that sound rang happy on our ears. We had survived to fight another day.

I suppose the moral to the story is that if you want to bankrupt your worst enemy, advise him to take a Stripshow to Glasgow.

They say that Glasgow is no mean city. In the world of the theatre, it always had a reputation for giving English comics the

bird. Many years ago there was an old music hall there called *The Ponophican*, where up and coming young comics were given a baptism of fire. If you passed your comedians exam. in this hall, you could play anywhere in Scotland. A vegetable stall was parked outside the hall. It did a good trade in fresh fruit but a far better trade in rotten fruit. On one opening night, a fellow at the head of the queue bought up all the rotten fruit, in fact, half a sack of it. The stall-holder said; "I see you're going in to greet the new comedian". "You're wrong" says your man, throwing the sack over his shoulder, "I am the new comedian".

Down through the years, Glasgow was always a tough spot for an aspiring artist. There used to be wire netting covering the orchestra pit to protect the men and instruments from damage. Should the throwing act start, there was also a wire net curtain to be dropped in front of the stage. I have heard of a harpist who sat with the harp slanted between him and the audience, just as the Roman Warriors held their shields for protection. One particular night he was belted with potatoes which came through his harp strings like chips. When he finished his act, he picked up a handful of potato chips and said: "I'll have these for supper, if somebody throws me a bit of fish". He may not have got the cod but he got an encore and deserved it.

It was interesting to note the varying attitudes of audiences in different parts of Britain.

The Follies Bergere opened to a packed house at *The Empire*, Leeds. The dialogue was very suggestive and the nudes were of all shapes and sizes. By law, they had to stand in a set position and were barred from movement on the stage. A difficult thing to do, even with your clothes on. But there's always a way to beat the system. Students from Leeds University came to *The Empire* well armed with mice and hankies. They tied the hankies onto the mice and threw them from the boxes. As if by parachute, the mice floated gracefully onto the stage. Then they sought an escape and so did the nudes. There were howls of laughter from the audience and an imminent riot was avoided when the Police moved in. A good job they didn't think of that idea in Glasgow. They'd probably have thrown rats in blankets.

As the 'Forties faded out, I began to feel the winds of change blowing through my bones again. There was a big world out there and Harry Bailey hadn't, as yet, experienced it. However, sooner than I imagined, my wishful thinking became a reality.

ACT V

"All the World's a Stage"

In the closing days of 1949 George Formby asked me to join his Company for a tour of Canada. What a tour that was! Other than the fifty quid a week pay, I really wanted to see the beauties of Canada, with its wonderful mountains and lakes. The money wasn't that great because I had to pay my own hotel expenses and George had booked us into the best hotels, to add a touch of class to his show. But six months work is six months work.

We sailed from London, Third class, simply because there was no Fourth. The Company consisted of George and wife, Hersel Henlere, a comedy piano act, Marcia Sanders, songstress, the Carsony Brothers, acrobats, Henry Vadden, juggler, Roger Carne and his Tom Cat ventriloquist, and of course, Irish Comedian, Harry Bailey. Halfway across George was asked by the Captain to run a concert for the passengers and as he and his wife were travelling first class, he sent for me down below. He had to ask my permission because I was a representative of the Variety Artists' Federation. George wanted to entertain only the First-class passengers, but we objected, so finally, all the passengers drew lots and the lucky ones saw the show.

We were the first boat into Canada after the freeze-up and, as it happened, the last boat out before the freeze-up that year. As the ship sailed up the St. Lawrence, George gave the Company quite a pep-talk and suggested that should we work hard and well, a bonus was in the offing. We didn't stop at Quebec but went on to Montreal where we were fixed up at a hotel. I

spent the afternoon sightseeing and must have climbed a thousand steps to see the hall where the Peace Treaties were signed.

The next night we opened at *The Forum Theatre and Icerink*, which seated around seventeen thousand people. It was the largest hall I ever played in and there were speakers right down either side of the hall. Your voice over the mike was like a stone rolling down a galvanized roof. The floor was really an icerink covered with wood so one could always console oneself if the audience wasn't appreciative by assuming they were simply frostbitten. Formby knew the score as he had been here the year before and he was extremely popular with the Canadians. Though he always appeared to have control of the situation, it was really Mrs Formby who did the hiring and firing. George simply made the bullets.

After our first show, Roger and I decided to walk home, not realising that the Main Street runs for miles. About 3.00 a.m. and nearing our hotel we saw a fellow being bounced out of a bar and we took his place. The bar on the right was for women, the one on the left for men and the middle bar was mixed, like a country church in Ireland. One also had to have a plate of food to qualify for a drink. The waiter brought us two pints of beer and a supply of salt and he explained that a little salt taken from the back of the hand counteracted the very hot weather. This, to me, was living in style.

Next morning we were off to Toronto and fixed up at Walker House. Moneywise these expensive hotels were ruining us. We couldn't eat to our satisfaction, so we went downtown and bought a suitcase, cheese, bread, butter, knives and forks and a chicken. Now we were in business. As we crossed the road to return to our hotel, a policeman appeared from nowhere and gave us two tickets for jay-walking. This cost us four dollars. We may as well have had dinner in the hotel. When you're short of money things never go right.

We opened at *The Alexandra* and business was booming. After the show a traffic-cop on a motorcycle approached me to compliment me on the show. After a chat he agreed to collect

With Frank Ifield, in Canada.

me next morning at the hotel for a game of golf. When he paged me he was wearing a beautiful mohair suit and he drove a large chevolet car. He told me that he had two jobs and said that nobody could live in Canada unless you held two jobs. In my mind's eye, my paypacket was growing smaller by the moment. That promised bonus from George Formby would be a Godsend.

When we left Toronto, we did a series of one-night stands, right across the Provinces. We played in icerinks, bullrings, cinemas and theatres from Niagara Falls to London, Ontario. We crossed the Rockies on the Canadian Pacific Railway on our way to Vancouver. What a breathtaking journey that was, bordering

beautiful lakes and the smell of the pine trees everywhere. Vancouver was the head depot of the Inniskillen Fusiliers. In my act I used to wear a saffron kilt and the Fusiliers were convinced that it was especially worn for their benefit. On the closing evening they invited me to their Mess to entertain me. I brought Roger along. I got a shock when a full Company of kilted Fusiliers arrived at the theatre. There was a jeep for the V.I.P.'s, namely Roger and myself. Their band struck up and we were off for a most enjoyable evening. Needless to say, I was also wearing my kilt.

Next morning we appeared at the Ferry much the worse for wear. Instead of sympathy we got abuse from Mrs. Formby, who appeared to have taken a sudden dislike to my saffron kilt. I was sick all the way to the island of Innemi. There we played at *The Capitol* and the Indian Reservation. George was made an honorary Indian Chief, which was literally and metaphorically a feather in his cap. I noticed that Hersel Henlere was missing and was informed that Mrs. Formby had sacked him in Vancouver for overstaying his stage time. He had to pay his own fare home to England. This news didn't help my hangover.

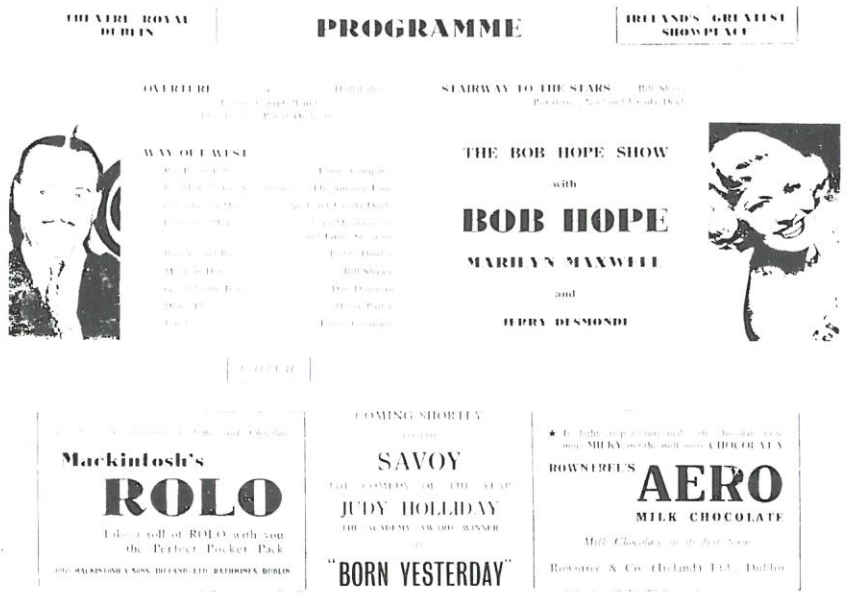
Our last show in Canada was in Regina and we were booked into a commercial hotel, which, not alone did not sell drink but would not allow it on the premises. Good thinking, Mrs. Formby! What a farewell party we could now have. Roger and I were booked into a doubleroom with a tiny children's room off it. As most of the Company had bought drinking licenses at five dollars a go, we decided to have a bottle party and discreetly brought in the booze. As the party got noisier, the house detective warned us a few times but, naturally, when the drink is in, the sense is out. On his third visit, the detective told us that the man in the next room was objecting. I said "What man? All our Company occupy the adjoining rooms". He said "The man in there", pointing to the little child's room, off mine. I went in, and there was Formby's pianist, with the phone in his hand, thanking the management. I was so mad that I grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and threw him out in the passageway. His clothes and

suitcase quickly followed. In the morning I regretted the incident and also thought about my bonus.

The journey to Quebec took three days. We all had sleepers and Formby, wife and pianist travelled First class. Mrs. Formby wasn't on talking terms with the Company, which was one of the more pleasant aspects of the journey. The first day we drank and played poker and reversed the process the second day. The third day we couldn't get a drink as we were travelling through a dry province. I went to the observation car, slipped a few dollars to the coloured attendant and told him I wanted a drink. He returned with a large jug of what appeared to be water. Talk about the Wedding of Cana. It turned out to be gin. The other passengers were amazed at our high spirits.

Towards the end of the trip, George sent for me and asked if I'd mind conducting the Company home, as I had acted as touring manager and stage manager during the whole episode. With the incentive of the extra week's pay bonus on my mind, I agreed. He informed me that he and Mrs. Formby were flying from Toronto to New York on business. He offered me a drink and gave me a large envelope with all the Company requirements for the trip back to England.

He spoke very highly of the standard of the tour just finished and asked me not to open the envelope until I reached the ship at Quebec. George left for Toronto and eventually, the Company persuaded me to open the envelope. Not a penny. Talk about disappointment. Bonus, me astrakhan collar, I just don't know how George's plane reached New York. The weight of prayers that followed it should have sucked it back to Toronto. I can assure you, it was a very unhappy company returning to England.

I was anxious to get home to Malahide. George later came to Ireland and opened a cleaning business. It didn't succeed. Somebody had put a rumour out, that George had been heard to say, during the war: "There's no difference between a Japanese and an Irishman. They're both yellow". He offered a thousand pounds to anybody who could prove that he made the statement. There were no takers. He packed his bags and went back to England.

The Bob Hope Show, Theatre Royal, Dublin 1951.

I think very few people are aware that George trained as a jockey at the Curragh. When his wife died, he remarried, and when he died he left his new wife a lovely home and loads of money—naturally enough!

On my return to Malahide, I decided to try and pull myself together and straighten things out. The world of showbusiness isn't conducive to living a regular lifestyle. Too much free time is the problem. Up late in the morning, collect mail from theatre, pint in the local pub, read papers, especially write-ups, game of golf in the afternoon or visits to the pictures, a cup of tea and off to the theatre to get ready for the first house.

My first Irish show, after Canada, ran for three months with three shows a day. I worked with Jimmy Campbell, Noel Purcell, Cecil Sheridan and Jack Cruise. Hal Roach and Johnny Caross were also ever-present. Then I went back to England and did a

Blackpool Nights Radio Show. After a few months in England, I was asked to do a tour of American bases. I remember Rabat, Morocco well, as we played it for a week. The natives were not too partial to the English, but seemed to like the Irish. I always wore a green label on my lapel, with Irlande written on it. The natives used to pull us into their stalls, shouting Irlande! Irlande! The rest of the cast stuck close to me and one cockney swore that he was from Killarney, probably the only place in Ireland he knew. French Morocco was quite dangerous and the huge guards at the hotel doors had to be seen to be believed. We flew to Madrid in a transport plane, a double-decker with parachutes and bucket seats. The weather was atrocious and we were flying at about 30,000 ft. when we were struck by lightning. It hit the tail and put a hole in it as big as a cottage door. The plane suddenly dropped about 500 ft., and gave us a massive fright. After Spain, we went on to Rome and Naples where we entertained on board an American battleship. They say "See Naples and die!" That bolt of lightning nearly reversed the process. We continued to play American atomic sites at the rate of two a day. Wherever we went, we were followed by touts who were willing to sell their watches or their mothers. I was talked into buying a watch, a fountainpen and even a piece of lava from Pompeii. Some of the cafes we visited were fairly modern. They had stomach pumps on every table. Rome was as bad as the rest. I was even asked to buy a piece of the true Cross.

In 1954, I did a tour of Germany, where I was based at Wiesbaden. I played at the Officers' Hotel which was a beautiful glass-fronted affair, but you're safe nowhere. Here the soundman taped all my comic acts, translated them into German and sold them to German comics. How did they ever lose the war? We toured nine different venues in Germany. One particular hall accommodated over 5,000 people. The audience was set out in three rows with tin bins down each aisle. When the soldiers finished their cans of beer they threw them into the bins which made an on-going battery of machine-gun like sounds. With an audience of 5,000 you can imagine the racket that went on during

a show. There's no business like show business, but there are limits. One soldier threw a can, missing the bin on purpose and hit a Black man sitting at a nearby table. Before you could say "Heil Hitler", the whole audience was fighting. They were acting as if nobody had informed them that the war was over. We tried to carry on as if nothing had happened, but when chairs began to fly we made for the dressingrooms and locked ourselves in. Soon the American M.P.'s arrived and their batons soon sorted things out.

It was tough going to Germany. Though there were separate shows for the Officers, the Sergeants and the Soldiers, the show ran literally day and night. If you were on late, you had to contend with a bored, drunken audience. Most camps were encircled with missiles, all pointing in what I thought was the direction of Russia. Planes were coming and going non-stop, so you also had to contend with the roar of the engines. I believe the policy, at the time, was to have planes in the air at all times in case of a sudden strike by the Russians.

One night while playing to the G.I.'s I was, as usual, wearing a kilt when a drunken soldier looked up at me and said "Is anything worn under that kilt?" I replied "No. Everything is in working order". He pestered me for some time until I told the audience the following story: "My father had a small farm in Ireland. One morning I was driving fencing stakes into the ground just in case the big wind would blow our farm into the neighbours. There was a donkey standing behind me and as I swung the sledge-hammer, I hit the donkey on the head and killed it. My old granny, who was very superstitious and believed in leprechauns, will-o-the-wisps and banshees, witnessed the accident. She came up to me and said that I shouldn't have killed the jackass because he'll come back and haunt me for the rest of my life. She was right because he's here tonight", I said, pointing to the drunken soldier.

On one German tour, the agent, who was a woman, kept me waiting three days for my money. So I went to Frankfurt, to her office, but was informed that she wasn't available. I produced a

letter, which I had received from the German Government thanking me for my services to the German forces at the Curragh and stating that I would always be made welcome in Germany. I had always carried the letter with me, but never used it before. It certainly got a reaction in Frankfurt. Within minutes I was treated with the greatest of respect and received my money on the spot. You must always keep a trump card ready, just in case.

Carnival time in Germany is hectic and they celebrate every year for a week or two before Lent. We were doing a show in Stuttgart when I came into contact with the German revellers. I was enjoying a meal in my hotel when over twenty inebriated locals descended on the place. They all wore long leather coats and one fellow had his hat on upside-down. Another one grabbed a white tablecloth and wrapped it around his shoulders, emulating a priest. He opened a bottle of wine and proceeded to walk around the diningroom, pouring wine over peoples' heads, while at the same time chanting: "I baptize thee, Jew". A Jewish singer in our show happened to be dining with me. He didn't complain, but in typical Bailey-Irish fashion I certainly did. "One baptism in life is enough", says I to myself. I complained to the Hotel Manager and he, in turn, complained to the Germans. The baptism ceremony ceased. They apologised and asked me to join them. I had little choice. Remember there were over twenty of them there. Serious drinking now took over. Each participant had to give a toast. One fellow raised his glass and said "Heil Hitler". Everybody cheered and so did I. The next said "Heil Reichmarshall Herman Goring". Everybody cheered and so did I. On and on the toasts went with "Heil Die Luftflotten" and "Heil Luftwaffe" and so on until my turn came. Unprepared and lacking a script, all I could think of was "Heil Father Matthew". Everybody cheered and so did I. The Apostle of Temperance would turn in his grave if he saw the amount of alcohol consumed that night.

There was only one English-speaking Club in Weisbaden and four of us went there for a drink one evening. At a table next to us were five ladies and one of them spoke with a slight Irish

accent. We got into conversation, if you could call it that and I became the main spokesman as I had a tiny smattering of German. Drinks flowed like the River Rhine and, my three pals kept on complimenting me on my wonderful control of the local dialect. That was, until the bill arrived and it transpired that I had been literally supplying the whole club with drink all night. We refused to pay and the so-called ladies raised hell. Before you could say "Pint of Beer", our hands were locked behind our backs and we were frog-marched outside. We proceeded to another Club and, this time, spoke English only.

While in Germany, I became a member of the professionals' club, which was aptly named *The Vagabond's Club*. While working for the Americans, membership enabled us to buy cameras, cigars, whiskey etc., at cost price. This was a great concession, but, of course, give a performer an inch and he'll take a yard. Some of the "professionals" began to operate their own black-market and we lost our privileges.

The Americans were tough but simple audiences. Most of them had never seen the sea before sailing abroad. They threw their money around as if there was no tomorrow. But, as time went on, they were soon buying their own single drinks and smoking their own cigarettes, also. You soon got used to calling a lorry a truck, a footpath a sidewalk and a lift an elevator. Hotels were not expensive but breakfast was not included. Tea was impossible to get, so you brought your own. Butter and eggs were both costly and difficult to come by. The buses we were supplied with were a disaster. Every second one broke down. In the performing arenas, mikes didn't work and most audiences were drunk. There were hecklers galore and whenever they heckled me, I would retort with: "Talk to the wall, it's plastered too", or, "The last time I saw a mouth like yours, it had a hook in it", or, "Take a walk in the river until your hat floats". But there were friendly Americans, too. One American General invited me to his quarters for a drink. I noticed on his writing table three pictures of women. He told me that the one in the middle was his wife, whom he loved dearly. The woman on the

Harry Bailey, Jack Cruise, Cecil Sheridan and Mixer Reed.

Retaliation after an "injury" during the Inkblots (Press) -v- Crackpots (Stage) game at Dalymount Park, Dublin, Sunday, January 6th, 1952.

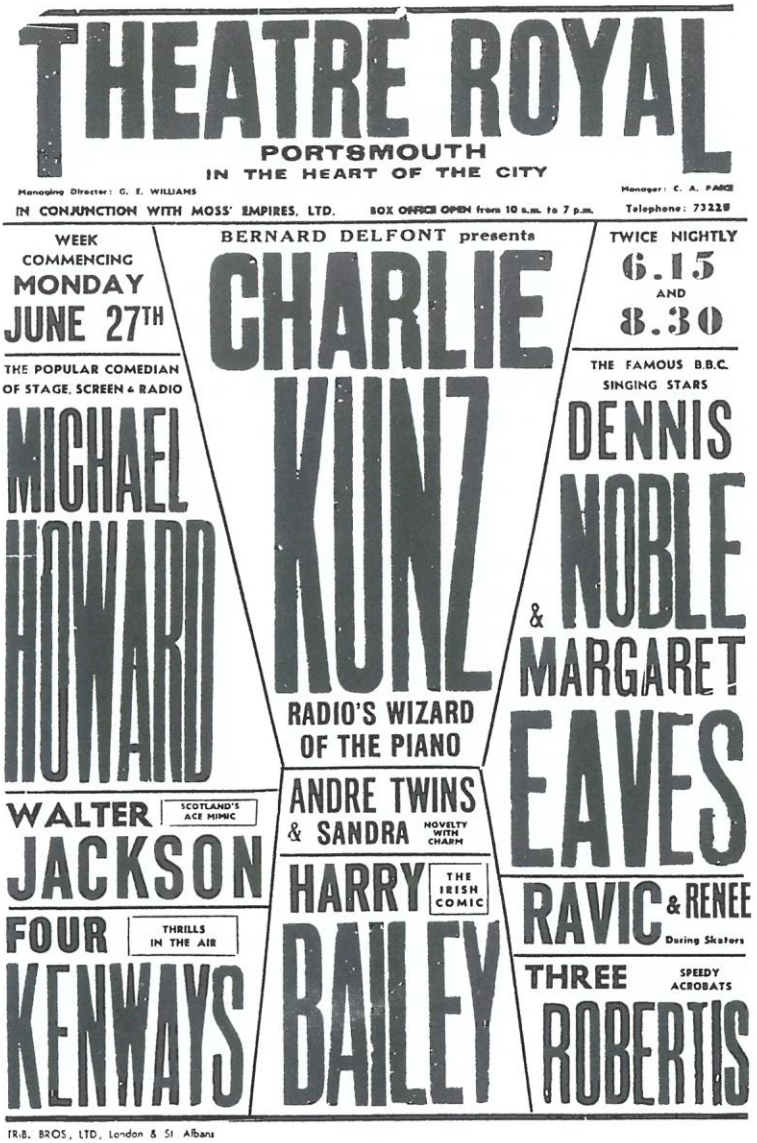
right was from Northern Ireland and the lady on the left he had met in London. The whole scene reminded me of The Crucifixion.

From Germany I returned home to play *The Theatre Royal* for a few weeks and then back to England to play *The Chelsea Palace*, in London. While at home in Malahide, I was invited to appear at a private birthday dinner party. My accompanist was a man called Frank Darlington, ex-actor, ex-engineer and ex-anything else you like. Five-foot-nothing in height, Frank compensates with a very big heart. Like myself he likes the wee dram and he had a fair share of whiskey to buck up his courage. I think he was a little in awe of me, at the time. Anyway, when I arrived, with my daughter, I realised too late that Frankie was under the weather. He directed himself to the piano stool to

introduce me, with what I dare say, he intended to be a flourish on the keys. Unfortunately. the keyboard wasn't long enough for him and he continued into space and landed at my feet. When he was helped back to the piano stool he made the following speech: "Boys and thirls, I'm not under the influence of alchohol and I'm not as thunk as some thinkle people tink I am. If you tink I'm thunk, you just wait till you see Tarry". It was a great party and after Frank had a few more drinks, we played for two hours or more. He accompanied me or vice versa. As far as I can remember, we were a huge success and both of us had to be driven home.

No matter where you travel abroad, there's always more crack at home. I remember some years ago when our show was playing at the Cinema in Tuam. The local barber was an ex-soldier with the British Army during the 1914–1918 War. He was the proud owner of a very large waxed moustache and it was his pride and joy extending as it did about three inches on either side of his mouth. At lunchtime, each day, he followed the same routine. Four pints in the local hotel, followed by a snooze in his barber's chair. One afternoon, a couple of local wags walked in to find him snoring, so they quietly snipped off one end of his moustache. It was the talk of Tuam for weeks afterwards. In our show at the local cinema, one scene concerned a race meeting. When I heard of the vanishing moustache episode, I inserted the lines: "They're off, they're off, gone in a flash like the barber's moustache" which naturally enough got an extra big laugh. However, he who laughs last, laughs longest. The barber sued me for holding him to ridicule. I had to seek out a solicitor and when the case came to Court some months later, I had to return from London to Tuam just to hear the Judge award the barber one shilling, which, may I add, also got a laugh in the Courthouse.

The Courthouse also reminds me of another amusing happening which took place in Glenamaddy, Co. Galway, many years ago. We were playing the old Courthouse at the time. Gaby Taylor was about to marry my sister Cherry. I had built them a two-wheeled trailer, as a wedding present, and it was almost



Portsmouth – a regular port of call, where I played many a time to enthusiastic audiences.

finished when we reached the town. All it needed was a couple of shelves. While setting-up for the show, I noticed a fine board lying behind the Courthouse door. I honestly didn't realise that it was used for Court business once a month even though there was white lettering in legal terminology on one side of it. I cut it up and it made perfect shelves for Gaby's caravan. After the wedding, for some reason, unknown to me, Gaby invited a Civic Guard to his caravan for a drink. Maybe he was keeping on the right side of the law, as one of the Ford lorries wasn't taxed. I don't think insurance was necessary in those days. If it was, we hadn't got any anyway. When Gaby opened a cupboard door, the Guard noticed the Courthouse noticeboard and suddenly stopped drinking. Words led to more words and, in the heel of the reel, Gaby was summoned, not, as you might think, for the Court noticeboard, but for not having tax on his lorry. A costly drink it was.

However, not all our experiences with the Gardai ended in summonses. Travelling around Ireland, father used to photograph all the Guards in the local stations and then sell them the photographs. They liked to see themselves in uniform and it was a good public relations exercise for my father. At home in Malahide, father used to play cards in the local police station until three or four in the morning. As there were four or five Gardai stationed there, problems arose when a guard was out sick, on leave, or on nightduty. They always liked to have five card-players round the table and anyway, problems exist to be solved. One solution was for one of the Guards to go out and arrest a cyclist who had no light on his bike. This wasn't difficult as few cyclists rarely bothered about bicycle lamps. If the poor unsuspecting cyclist could play Solo he was invited back to the station for a game and then left off with a caution. Those were the days!.

It was now the early 'Fifties and things were booming. I was at my prime and never short of work. Job offers were coming from all angles and travel was no obstacle. In one week I did a show in London, Manchester, Dublin and Cork. Yes, the 'Fifties was certainly my best decade.

ACT VI

My Unforgettable 'Fifties

There may have been 'roaring 'Twenties' and 'swinging 'Sixties', but the 'Fifties, to me, were the greatest years of my career. I suppose, it was typical of my life-style to be doing well when everybody else appeared to be doing badly. Back and forth to England, I regularly met many Irish emigrants seeking work abroad. I had the cash then and often helped to drown the sorrows of a departing emigrant on his lonely trip to London.

The secret of success in Liverpool, I found, was to be as topical and local in your gags, as humanly possible. On the Liverpool Docks, nicknames abounded and any comic, worth his salt, would introduce a few of them into his act. Some of the names, I readily recall. Two characters were known as the Wailing Wall and the Prince of Wales because both of them were moaners. The Limping Monk was a poor chap who had one short leg and always wore a duffle coat, with the hood up. Then there was the Broken Watch, who would never do a day's work and told everybody that he had a bad ticker. There was a foreman named Frank Ifield simply because every time somebody didn't agree with him, he would say "I'll remember you". As is usual with nick-names, they usually come into use because of some poor devil's infirmity. One docker was known as the Ten Commandments because he had ten large prominent teeth. Liverpudlians loved local gags like the girl who was always down the docks with the sailors. On three occasions, the Magistrate had fined her 2, 3 and 5. Finally, he told her that if she ever came up

before him again, he would send her to a home, to which, she replied: "I hope it's a Sailor's Home".

They say that in Liverpool, they launch ships with a rubber bottle so as not to wake up the workers. Another docker brought up before the Magistrate for being drunk and disorderly said that he was celebrating his son calling him "Da! Da!" for the first time. The Magistrate said: "I understand. How old is he?" "Fifteen", answered the docker.

I believe that 1953 was my best year. I played *The Opera House*, Blackpool and when "you can make it there, you can make it anywhere" as the song goes. Terry Thomas topped the bill and, for some reason or other, we didn't get on very well. We played a sketch called "He who gets sacked". A very ominous title, I'm sure you'll agree. Terry insisted on me wearing a rose in my buttonhole as he always wore a carnation. I agreed for peace sake. The stage was arranged as a double set and, as part of the act, I used to throw a paper-mache inkpot after him to hit the curtain behind him as he departed into the next room. One night, he delayed his departure too long and I hit him on the nose with the inkpot. It bled profusely, his nose, that is, and naturally enough, he wasn't too happy. Maybe, that's why we didn't get on too well. Needless to say, we rehearsed the act again the following morning. On another occasion Lester Ferguson, another of the cast, contacted a heavy dose of the 'flu. The theatre doctor gave him an injection before he went on. He walked on the stage and fainted.I immediately pulled him off stage by grabbing his legs, turned to the audience and said "Well, that's got rid of him". I got a laugh and I stayed on telling a few gags, while behind the curtain the smelling-salts were in action while they were setting up the next scene.

When the Blackpool season was over, I was asked to deputise for Tony Hancock who had taken ill while playing *The Adelphi* in London. Naturally, I was thrilled, not for poor Tony's illness but for the opportunity to appear in the West End. Jimmy Edwards and Vera Lynn were also starring. I was installed in Tony's dressing room and rehearsed with the orchestra. Mr. Edwards

With Jimmy Edwards, playing the Adelphi Theatre, The Strand, London. Standing in for Tony Hancock.

informed me that there may be a little resentment from the audience as they would have come mainly to see Tony Hancock. He told me not to worry too much as two previous comics had got through all right. I thought to myself, "my God, I'm the third lamb to the slaughter". There was one little notice at the paybox stating that Tony wouldn't be appearing, but you'd need a telescope to read it. But "Beggars can't be choosers" and I suppose forewarned is to be forearmed. I walked on, dressed in a green velvet coat, buff pants, green shoes and a tie with a large shamrock on it. I opened with "Hello there! In case you might want to know who I am? I'm Irish. I take it, you all know who you are. It's wonderful to be here for the first time in . . . in . . ." and taking a piece of paper from my breast pocket, "in England". I think that I looked so worried and forlorn that they immediately

took to me. I played a very successful three weeks at *The Adelphi.*

Next I was booked by the *Combined Services Entertainment* for a tour of the Middle East. We left from Gatwick, flew to Nice for lunch and on to Malta for dinner. My arms are still aching! Malta was an experience for me, with very little grassland to be seen and the farming community scraping a living between the rocks. The docks were called Bailey Docks before I arrived so I'm not responsible for them. Every third or fourth house was a pub,with hostesses to entertain the customers. From Malta we flew to Derna, where I stayed in Rommel's room, which was reputed to be haunted. In Tobruk, we visited the military cemetery, a sad reminder of the futility of war and then travelled over the mountains on a snakelike road built by Mussolini, surrounded by fortified homes built for the Italians to help cultivate the land. The homes, now deserted, housed sheep and goats. As per usual, our bus broke down and we wandered about in the sun for over three hours before we were towed to our next venue. A quick bath, some iced gin and a few pints of beer made us ready for action. The night's show went O.K., but I'm afraid we made fools of ourselves at the dinner after the show. Too much gin combined with too much sunshine is an automatic recipe for disaster. I apologised to the Commanding Officer the next morning and offered to pay for whatever damage we had caused. He told me that I had been more troublesome than Hitler but was quite nice about it and blamed himself for giving us too much drink after being in the desert for hours.

Conditions improved when we reached the Canal Zone. We played every camp in the area and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. In our free time, we swam in the great lakes, watched the ships up and down the Suez Canal and even rode camels. I visited Cairo and things were so good that it was hard to imagine we were being paid as well. The R.A.F. even flew me to Cyprus, just to view the place.

The previous show hadn't moved out when we moved in so it gave me the opportunity of meeting the well-known comic

Alex Munro. I found him asleep under a billiard table, which he assured me was the only cool place in the camp. I think he was sleeping off a heavy drinking session and even if he wasn't, he certainly was, when I left him. I did a second tour of the Middle East as well, but the first one is always more exciting.

In late '53, offers were coming my way, from all directions and I went on tour with *The Five Smith Brothers*. Actually, one of them was only a cousin. They were great golfers. I was now a member of the Variety Golf Society and we played every Tuesday in the provinces and Wednesdays in London – I still have the two Captain's Prizes I won. I went everywhere with the five Smiths and we became the greatest of pals. People talk about ships that pass in the night but I must say that among variety folk there's a great sense of camaraderie. I got to know their wives and families and there was never a dull moment as they were great practical jokers. We played Aladdin for the Christmas Pantomime in *The Sunderland Empire*. The five brothers were the comedy policemen. I played Wishee Washie and Hilda Baker was Widow Twankey. Two shows a day at 2.15 p.m. and 6.45 p.m. and the stalls cost four shillings and three pence while the Balcony cost you only one shilling. Haven't times and prices changed? To crown a great year, I was offered Blackpool again for summer season 1954.

Blackpool was hectic in the 'Fifties. All the top acts were there. Eve Boswell of *Doggie in the Window* fame was in our show,as was Harry Seacombe. I remember judging a beauty contest with Max Bygraves, who was performing at *The Blackpool Hippodrome*. Max was a most charming individual and richly deserved his popularity. So was Eddie Calvert who made a fortune out of one tune, *Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White*. He drove a huge mercedes and had his own light aeroplane. He spent money as if he feared that it was going to go out of fashion. Harry Seacombe was extremely generous also. One day as we were about to play, it rained very heavily. Harry went into the Pro. shop and bought an umbrella for everybody playing. At that time we usually played for two pounds a hole. I was earning

more from the golf than I was on the stage. Charlie Drake heard of my prowess at the golf game so one night he invited me to stay at his hotel which was close to the Golf Links. He put on a buffet supper for me and supplied me with the best of drinks. In the morning he suggested golf. I asked him what his handicap was and he replied: "The same as yours". I was playing off a six handicap at that time. After eighteen holes he owed me sixteen pounds. He ordered lunch and in the afternoon I took another twelve pounds off him. Instead of being annoyed, he bought me a dozen golf balls and insisted I took them.

Though I was tasting success both in the theatre and in golf, I was still highly vulnerable in the outside world. One evening a youth of about eighteen came to the stage door and gave me a story about an Aunt of his in Ireland who had paid for his holiday and he had overspent and required ten pounds. He even offered his watch as security. I gave him the ten quid. No sooner had my money departed when the detectives arrived. The senior detective said to me: "You're a very trusting man, Mr. Bailey. Would you lend me ten pounds?" I said, "Yes, when the young lad returns it". A short time later, a well dressed man, smoking a cigar, called to my dressingroom, looking for his fare back to Dublin. I suggested a couple of quid to get him to the Liverpool boat. He said that he was used to flying. I said: "Blessed is he who expects nothing as he shall not be disappointed," and closed the dressingroom door on him. The word must have been out: "Bailey's a softie".

Playing a summer season in England in the 'Fifties involved more than just doing a show in a theatre. Charity shows meant a huge amount of travel. There were times when I felt like Christopher Columbus who, when he arrived in America didn't know where he was and when he arrived home, didn't know where he had been. Many a day I had to turn out for a cricket match and be dressed for the part. You were expected to bowl and bat and act, as well. Football charities were a regular happening, and this often involved doing a running commentary or shooting the forwards with a revolver when they appeared likely

to score. I attended Sports, Regattas, Dances, Festivals and Blackpool Lights. Tough going on the old constitution, I can assure you. I've judged swimming competitions and beauty competitions and competitions where neither a swimmer or a beauty would dare be seen.

On one occasion Tommy Trinder was compere at *The London Palladium Show*, which had been transferred to Blackpool. Because of dense fog, Tommy couldn't make it and I was asked to compere. Guy Mitchell was topping the bill but, unfortunately, he had just broken a bone in his ankle and had to support himself with a walking stick. The Theatre, of course, invented improvisation. The idea was that Guy would be "discovered" sitting at a table, hidden by a bouquet of flowers, which also helped to conceal the mike. I went on and introduced him, but, of course, he wasn't ready, so I had to ad lib for a while. Eventually, I had to come off stage but before I departed I mentioned that "they were walking Guy around the building, trying to sober him up". The curtain was drawn and it was revealed that his mike hadn't been turned on, I managed to do this, rather discreetly, I thought. Have you ever looked for something in a bouquet of flowers, while only appearing to admire and smell the fragrance? By the time, I had switched on his mike and reintroduced him, the phone was buzzing in the theatre with calls as to why I was messing up Guy Mitchell's performance. People were asking was Guy drunk or more pertinently, was I drunk? Even though I had saved the situation, I was now the apparent culprit. The Press took up the issue and I was forced to make a public apology. As the man says, you can't win them all!

There's a local man in Malahide who always says when he's drinking and having a chat: "If I want an argument, I'll go home to my wife". It was quite the reverse with me. I never had any problems finding arguments and seemed to thrive on them. If you have difficulty defining an argument, just follow me around the Workingmen's Clubs in England. My first introduction into Clubs of this type began in Wolverhampton. While playing there I was asked to do an extra spot in a club in Bilston. When I

arrived there I was informed that a colour bar was in vogue at the time and a Negro comedian, Benny Nightingale, had been barred from the Club. Through my intervention, Nightingale did his spot, though he was refused a drink at the bar. I got a big write-up in the national papers for breaking the colour bar, but as Equity had not made up its mind about the whole crazy situation, I was barred from a number of clubs over the incident.

I played *The Room at the Top* in Ilford, London, for a week. I did a gag with the saxophone and said now I'll give you "a really little hot number I know. It's Manchester 254390." It unfortunately turned out to be a lady's number and all the lame brains in Manchester kept telephoning the unfortunate woman. Incidentally, this was a televised show. It was the producer's fault, naturally, but as luck would have it, he was on holidays and his assistant hadn't given me a dead or non-existent phone number as he should have done. I flew back to Dublin after the performance and when I returned to the Club House in Malahide the following day, after a fruitful day's golf, I was approached by a local press reporter. This was the first I knew of the incident and, again, as per usual, I was writing apologies. The telephone-lady's husband threatened to sue me but I heard no more about it. The Assistant Producer got the sack and I was never again asked back to that particular T.V. show.

But a few hiccoughs don't ruin a wonderful decade of activity and enjoyment. I appeared with Slim Whitman at *The Empire*, Glasgow. I remember that they took all the violinists out of the orchestra, put check shirts on them and sat them in a semi-circle behind him. He sang Rose Marie three times. Around this time, I appeared with Sophie Tucker in *The Casino*, London. She was a wonderful artist and received a huge welcome. In this show, the Berry Brothers' did a dancing act and their final trick was to jump from an eight-foot pedestal into the splits. I had to follow their act. The orchestra conductor, who didn't like my act suggested to me that I join the Berry Brothers jump with a rope round my neck. It didn't endear him to me, but then again, conductors, be they bus or music, rarely seemed to appreciate me.

I was asked to do a St. Patrick's Day Concert at *The Ritz Cinema* in Wigan. Albert Healy led a number of Irish Acts. I travelled from Edinburgh on the Sunday and arrived to be told that the Sunday Observance Laws decreed that no make-up or costume would be allowed on the stage. I had intended wearing my kilt for St. Patrick's Day but those decrees knocked the bottom out of that intention. The Parish Priest broke the news to me and I had no option but to accept the circumstances. He offered me my fee but I couldn't take it. After all, it was for charity—i.e., my wife and kids at home! He invited me to the Parochial House and introduced his favourite brand of Irish whiskey. It must have been St. Patrick who safely saw me to my hotel that night. The next morning I drove to London to do a charity show for Guinness. I was entertained in typical Guinness fashion and given one hundred pounds for my travelling expenses. My next performance was at a Catholic Guild Concert at *The Stoll Theatre*, with Jack Cruise as Compere. I was awarded the spot of honour and was last on the programme which included artists like Dickie Henderson and Ted Ray. Apart from Cardinal Heenan, there were hundreds of clergy present. Seeing the Cardinal in his box and recalling that I was now a Knight of Columbanus, I cut my comic cloth to the right length and all blue material was immediately discarded. I started with the Cannibal, who ate the Catholic Priest. It was his first taste of Christianity. Then addressing the Cardinal, I told an old story, which went down well. It went something like this: "When his Eminence was a Parish Priest in Ireland, he was always in trouble. Three good friends of his in the parish won thirty thousand pounds a piece in the Irish Hospitals' Sweepstake. Keary, Christie and Murphy were their names and they each bought a pub, but found difficulty in obtaining licences. All three approached the Parish Priest to put a word in for them, which, of course, he offered to do and promised a prayer as well. In time, the three publicans received their licences and the Priest, naturally enough, went to congratulate all three. "You got your licence, I hear", he says to Keary. "I did indeed, says Keary, "thanking you very much, your Reverence". "You know about the new wing we're adding to the

Sophie Tucker at the Casino Theatre, West End London.

Church, I suppose", says the Priest. "I do", says Keary, and presented the Priest with a cheque for five hundred pounds. Now, the Priest, being a firm believer in the three-personed God immediately saw visions of three times five hundred pounds, so he visited Christie and collected the second instalment. But it was a different story with Murphy. "Good morning, Mr. Murphy", says he. "It is", said Murphy, "but no thanks to you". "I hear you got your licence", says the Priest. "I did", says Murphy, "but no thanks to you". "How do you mean no thanks to me", says the Priest. "Didn't I put a word in for you and pray for you as well". "You can't fool me", says Murphy. "I was at Church last Sunday and I heard you clear enough. You said Keary a Licence, Christie a Licence but there's no bloody way you said Murphy a Licence".

I well recall a show in the Hilton Hotel where Tony O'Reilly was running a concert in aid of Kerry Gold Cheese. He had Gay Byrne there to help him, as well as a fourteen-piece orchestra. Tony and Gay were failing to outgag each other and, as they were both comperes, the show was destined for failure. I was scheduled to do only five minutes. Sure, I could have stayed at home and phoned my jokes in. Five minutes is no good to any comedian. Anyway, they showed me my dressing room and on my way there I met the head waiter who had come from the Gresham Hotel, in Dublin. He filled my dressingroom with whiskey, gin and beer and said: "It's on the house, Harry. Help yourself". I was never one to ignore an invitation, and was in great form when my turn came. There seated in front was the same Cardinal Heenan in the company of the Irish Ambassador. The rest of the hall was filled with wholesale merchants. Each prior act had been introduced either by Gay or Tony and, somehow, their gags had not been getting through. As I came on stage, Tony O'Reilly said to me: "Do as long as you like, Harry. It can't go any worse". I opened with: "You're not a very happy looking audience. Can't you sell Kerry Gold, or are you just cheesed off". "A few days ago", I said, "I walked into a shop and asked how much is the Kerry Gold butter. The answer was

sixpence a pound. How much is the Kerry Gold cheese then? Sixpence for two pounds was the answer. "I just don't know how you do it", I said. "Are you the boss?" "No" he said. "The boss is upstairs messing about with my wife and that's why I'm messing about with his business down here". I gave a quick look at the Cardinal and he raised his eyes towards heaven. My act went down well and when I finished I walked down front and shook hands with the Cardinal and apologised for the slightly blue tinge to my act. "I agree with you, Harry", he said, "You had me sitting on my scapulars". He took me by the arm and led me towards the buffet. Winking, he assured me that any doubts I had about my act would now be removed, almost by divine intervention. A kind, sympathetic and popular man, indeed.

The following summer, I played the Isle of Man and this gave me the opportunity to bring my wife and two boys over there for the holidays. I won the Visitors Cup at the Isle of Man Open Golf Championship and also got my only hole-in-one in my whole golfing career. The summer season was highly enjoyable there and I organised comedy football matches as well as being presented to the Isle of Man T.T. Winner.

In 1956, I toured with David Whitfield, a great womanizer. He was the image of Alan Ladd, with a shock of fair hair. While I beat him regularly at golf, I never succeeded against him in the darts. He had learnt the dart game in the rough and tumble of the docklands and you can't beat experience like that. Each Christmas, I returned to *The Royal* in Dublin for the annual Pantomime. By this time, *The Royal* included many American and English acts in its programme. I remember Judy Garland suffering a slight setback when she took off her shoes on stage to sing *Cockles and Mussels*. The Press criticised her, saying that Molly Malone never took her shoes off. Maybe, poor old Molly didn't have any shoes! Judy always had the audience eating out of her hand when she sang "It's a great day for the Irish".

When not in Ireland, I toured England with David Whitfield. He'll always be remembered for his *Cara Mia Mine*. While with David I met Janet Brown, who today is still going strong with

The Three B's – Brighton, Billy Butlin and Bailey.

her impressions of Margaret Thatcher. Any vacant dates I had were filled up working the clubs. I always got a great reception at the Irish Club, in Kilburn, London. One night all the buttons were torn off my jacket, such was the enthusiasm. A similar thing happened to Hal Roach in Hammersmith. The price one pays for popularity!

In the latter years of the 'Fifties, I played *Butlin Holiday Camps* on a regular basis and enjoyed them immensely. It is far easier, of course, to entertain people when they're in a holiday atmosphere and holiday mood than, say, an inebriated audience in a working-men's club who often seemed to find comedy an

intrusion on their drinking. The usual gags went down well in Mosney. When I'd arrive on stage I'd say: "The Manager told me to come out here and paralyse you. I think somebody got here before me. I had breakfast in the Camp Cafeteria this morning. I said to the waitress "These boiled eggs are a bit hard". "I only lay the tables," she replied. In the swimming pool, I met a pal of mine with one eye called Murphy. I don't know what he called the other eye. You're lucky to be here on holiday. To come here tonight I had to get out of a sick bed. My girlfriend has the 'flu. In the last Camp I played, I gave a beautiful rendering of *Danny Boy* on my violin and the tears streamed down the face of a lady in the front row. I asked her was she crying because she was sad and she answered "No, it,s because I'm a musician". So the patter went on. They enjoyed themselves and so did I. Billy Butlin and myself became the best of friends.

Songs were very popular at the holiday camp shows and the audience loved to join in the chorus. I recall one, in particular, which must have had at least twelve verses. To give you an idea I'll just quote one verse:

I saw a young lady last week on her bike.
She was riding full belt down the hill.
She hadn't any brake so she couldn't pull up.
And I saw she was in for a spill.
She got to the bottom, ran into a wall,
And fell in a heap on the ground.
I ran, picked her up and I noticed her face.
I said, "Are you hurt" and she answered "No".'
'I always get off like that! I always get off like that!
I've broken my bike and I've torn my clothes
And I fancy there's a bit off my nose.
It's a peculiar way I've got, I suppose
But I always get off like that! -I always get off like that!

Other verses involve a builder who fell twenty feet from a scaffolding, but was he hurt? "No, I had to come down for nails –

No! I had to come down for nails" and the fellow who was fighting in our street and got two teeth knock out. Was he worried? "No! I was thinking of having them out — No! I was thinking of having them out".

By this time, my catch-phrase "Carry me Out", had become well known and could be heard regularly during the shows. Butlins was the mecca for gag pinching, especially with the Red Coats. They stole or should I say, recorded, every comic's act, no matter who he was. It's alright to pinch a gag but when they knock off your whole act, it's a bit much, don't you think? I believe that patter acts should be licenced the same as songs. But, then again, there are many facets of life I've always failed to understand. Would somebody explain to me why there's only one Monopolies' Commission?

Golf helped to keep me sane as well as solvent. Probably my greatest achievement was to win the Murray Cup at St. Anne's in Lytham. My brothers-in-law drove me there to compete and Vinny parked the van facing the sea as I was on my way to catch the night boat at Holyhead. It poured out of the heavens all day, non-stop. Vinny was so wet that he had to retire from the course but his brother Kevin insisted that I play on, as he considered I stood a decent chance of winning. I finished, soaked to the skin and while I changed Vinny tried to start the van, but in vain. A group of disgruntled Club members had to give us a push and I'd say that they were glad to be rid of us. Before we left, I told the Secretary that they could drink the Sweepstake money, if I won the Cup. They had a good session, no doubt. The following year I won the Perpetual Challenge Cup at Woodbrook. I also played in the International Stars Exhibition Match at Heysham, in aid of the World Cancer Fund. The players, on this occasion were Billy Stutt, Ben Warris, Ted Ray and myself. The professionals were Harry Bradshaw, Christy O'Connor, Bobbie Locke and Fred Daly. We had a most wonderful game. I played with Harry Bradshaw and we won our match. Showbusiness people take their golf seriously. Some, in fact, take it too seriously, as I remember when I became Show Business Golfer of the Year

Show Business Golfer of the year 1956.
Presented to Harry Bailey by Bruce Forsyth and Arthur Haynes, Lupino Lane, Benny Hill, Baker and Douglas. Also present are leading artists' from Summer Shows Great Yarmouth.
Harry Bailey, Handicap 5.

in 1956. I was approached by one of the Organisers who asked me to throw my game against Bruce Forsyth. He assured me that Bruce wanted to win the Cup and I was the only one he was afraid of. When Bruce heard of this, he was absolutely furious and I'm sure when he met me in the final, he didn't even try. I still have the photo where Bruce presents me with the Cup. Please note that all knives have been pushed well into the table. Even Benny Hill seems decidedly confused. There certainly was no ill-feeling between Bruce and myself and he invited me to play in the Imperial Cancer Research Fund Competition, called "Fairway to the Stars" held at Ealing in 1961.

As the 'Fifties drew to a close I was up and down England like a yo-yo. There were times, indeed, when I would have needed the facility of bi-location, yet I managed to make all my dates. My circle of friends was growing rapidly and included Bob Monkhouse, Eddie Calvert, Emile Ford, Ben Lyons, Beebie

Winning the Perpetual Challenge Cup at Woodbrook.

Daniels, Anna Nagle, Ted Ray, Tommy Trinder, Johnnie Ray and the list goes on and on. My billing varied from "The King of Blarney" to "The Irish Buccaneer" to "The Irish Comic" and many I don't remember.

Radio I loved and *Workers' Playtime* did wonders for me. I did over one hundred shows on this particular programme which was tuned-in to factories and institutions all over England. It was a wonderful promotion for any artist and guaranteed keeping the wolf from the door.

It's funny how some artists, who afterwards made it very big, started their careers with many problem areas in their acts. I once did a show with Norman Wisdom in Barnsley. The Management didn't like his act. I believe they didn't quite understand it, and they asked me to finish the show. Next morning I went down to see Norman to explain the situation. He lived in a beautiful caravan and drove a Jaguar car. He invited me in for a cup of tea and I assured him that the management hadn't liked Harry Secombe's shaving act either, when he first did it. Later, when I played with Norman at *The Prince of Wales' Theatre* in London, he was an outstanding success and never looked back

after that. As you well know, he topped many a bill in later life and made numerous films.

Agents were important individuals and the development of your career greatly depended on their expertise. But, like myself, they tended to become confused at times also. Once, while performing in London, Leslie Grade came up to me and suggested that I should join his organisation. I said: "Thank you, Sir, but I am already booked by your agency". Sydney Grace, one of his agents had booked me, but, apparently, the information hadn't been passed on.

There's no doubt but some comics have a natural flair for comedy. I could stand at the side of a stage all night and watch Tommy Cooper. He was so free, easy and natural as also was Noel Purcell with whom everything appeared effortless. I recall Roy Castle when he was serving his time to Jimmy James, probably the finest and funniest comic I have ever seen. Harry Worth was a pleasure to watch and, of course, he started out as a ventriloquist. His dummy doll did all the talking while Roger Cairne's cat did the same for him. Ted Kavanagh, Syd James, Benny Hill, Mike Harwood, again, the list is endless. It was a pleasure and privilege to perform in their company. George Meaton was a magnificent impressionist and his train sounds would make you take a step back on the stage in fear of falling off the platform and under the train. His haunted house impression was out of this world. Well, it would have to be, wouldn't it?

I appeared on *The Billy Cotton Show* many a time, but I always got the feeling that he didn't like me. At least one reason for our estrangement was out of my control. I was supporting him at *The Palace*, Blackpool, and one evening as I approached the theatre, the doorman, who was a little loud-mouthed, saw me and shouted out: "Don't miss the great Harry Bailey Show tonight!" As he spoke, Billy Cotton walked around the corner and heard him. If looks could have killed there would have been a doorman's funeral the following day. I don't blame Billy for being upset. After all it was his show. A fine artist he was and his Sunday Billy Cotton Band Show was a huge success.

The B.B.C. booked me to do a tour of Germany, with Dick Emery and when I returned I did the summer season of 1958 at *The Winter Gardens*, Blackpool. Hilda Baker topped the bill. She certainly had changed since our Panto days at *The Sunderland Empire* when she used to carry around a drop of brandy in a cough-water bottle. Hilda had me playing or stooging in sketches, with not a single line to speak. The unkindest cut of all was that my appearance followed a dog act. Talk about man's inhumanity to man. Fortunately, for me, at least, I became good friends with the dog owner and was able to organise a few gags at the expense of the dog. As the dog departed the scene and I came on stage, I'd look after the departing dog and say: "Isn't that a clever dog The other day he saw a notice Wet Paint and he immediately obliged. I met his owner walking him up the street and I asked him where he was taking the dog. He said he was taking him to be destroyed. I asked him if the dog was mad. "Well", he said, "I can tell you, he's not too pleased". Thank God for small mercies and small dogs. He made my act. I was happy but I'm not sure if the same applied to Hilda Baker.

The following Christmas I played Panto in *The Pavilion*, Liverpool. I was with Lita Rosa in Robin Hood. I brought over from Dublin Cecil Nash and Mick Eustace to play the robbers. The Bad Baron was a Dubliner also, by the name of Kilgarriff Michael. It was a reasonably good show but nothing like the *Paul Raymond Cinderella Pantomime* where Cinderella wore a pair of genuine glass shoes, with a fantastic dress to match.

Times were good and I was making money. I even bought a new car, a Zodiac. I can tell you I needed it. The wear and tear on an artist's car is unbelievable, with hundreds of miles being clocked up and little time for servicing. No doubt, the same wear and tear is applicable to the human body, but in the excitement of success, one tends to disregard fatigue and discomfort.

In 1959, I did a summer season in the Isle of Man, with Freddy and the Dreamers and returned to compere a show in *The Royal Albert Hall*. Then Vic Oliver died in South Africa and I was engaged to take Vic's part in Belfast, where I nearly did the same thing. It was one of those terrible occasions when

Noel Purcell, Jack Cruise, Cecil Sheridan, Eddie Byrne, Mixer Reed and Danny Cummins.

Press -v- The Stage Charity Football Match 1959. Loose ends tidied up.

everything went wrong. For a start the scenery was too big for the stage and only half the music score arrived. I found myself in a situation where I didn't know the Panto and had no idea where the laughs were supposed to be. The Dame, who had been with the show for years was no help and, personally, I don't think that Dame would recognise a laugh if she woke up next to it.

We had no speciality act for the first two weeks and then the ceiling of number one dressingroom fell in, through dampness. The water pipes burst and all the props were soaked through and through. I got a heavy dose of 'flu and could only talk in a whisper, which didn't at all help on Opening Night when I had to play two parts, King Cole and his wicked brother, Rollo. The first night was for Charity. The Lord Mayor was present with all the City Dignitaries, including the Chief of Police. After the show there was a cocktail party and the Police Chief gave me a

special phone number and told me if I was ever in any sort of trouble, just ring him. I didn't realise at the time how useful that number would be. Misfortunes continued to hamper the show. The Principal Boy lost her voice and so we had to engage another singer. There wasn't a decent sketch in the show, not to mind a topical song. It's vital, especially in a place like Belfast, to have some local material, but, unfortunately, changing from one brother to another brother, didn't allow me time to insert some local gags into the show. I didn't even have a dresser, so as the show went on its weary way, I was slowly and surely becoming tired and sick of it. To get away from it all, I decided to motor home to Malahide, one Saturday night when the curtain had fallen. Harry Shields, the Dame, also in need of a break, came with me. It was a very wet night and we reached Banbridge around two in the morning. There were flashing lights which I vaguely saw, as I was speeding in my new Zodiac. Some shots rang out and that brought me to a stop alright. The car was surrounded by B-Specials, and as we were ushered unceremoniously out of the car Harry passed some remark about Cowboys and Indians. This was overheard and resembled a red rag to a bull. I took responsibility for the remark, apologised and we both showed our I.D.'s. We explained our journey but they were puzzled about our English car-plate number. They prodded us into a Barracks with their rifles where we were questioned by a Constable. Now the Police Chief's number came to the rescue and after fifteen minutes hassle, all difficulties were sorted out. From now on, the Constable assured me, all road blocks would be alerted to my car number and he even wrote me an extra note to make sure I had a trouble-free journey to Malahide every Saturday night that I decided to go home. Just shows you, some good comes out of cocktail parties.

While in Belfast, I did a midnight matinee at *he Forum Cinema*, with the Bridie Gallagher Show. The girl from Donegal was doing well at the time.

1960 had arrived and, I suppose, so had I. Fifty years old, a wife and five children, a new Zodiac, money in my pocket –

note, I didn't say bank – venues booked for the new decade and my career at its peak. Who would complain? I certainly wasn't complaining as I was eagerly looking forward to my South African Trip, which was only a month or two away.

ACT VII

African Safari

Did I tell you that I was crowned King of Dalkey? No, I didn't. Well, I have a photo to prove it. It was a great honour for me and it obviously proves that if I did tell the odd blue joke, it was only because I had blue blood in my veins. The night I was crowned was a very festive occasion. The chief organiser told me that a newly crowned King of Dalkey had to fulfil one condition and that was that he would have to spend one night on Dalkey Island, which was inhabited solely by goats. To this request I said "No problem". But he went on: "How about the smell?" "Well", I said "They'll just have to get used to it".

In 1960, I opened my African Tour at *The Beach Hotel Club* in Durban. I was under the impression that I would be part of a company, but on arrival, found that I was doing a one-man show. It's no joke being asked, out of the blue, to do a one-hour show. But a job is a job, I suppose, incidental to the time duration. It reminds me of the story where the teacher offered the class fifty pence if they could tell her who was the most famous men in history. Volunteers suggested Julius Caesar, Christopher Columbus and Napoleon, but she gave the money to a little Jewish boy, who suggested St. Patrick. "Why did you pick St. Patrick?" she asked him, to which he replied: "Deep down in my heart, I knew the answer should be Moses, but Business is Business!"

The Catholic Society of South Africa had booked the Club out for my opening night. The show went well, but they didn't

Crowned King of Dalkey.

like my parodying *Galway Bay* and other Irish songs. They requested me to sing them straight, which I did, and before the end of my act, I was presented with a medal, on behalf of the Irish Society of South Africa. I was delighted and as there was a large number of the Press present, it was great publicity. I had actually taken over from Tommy Trinder. I played Durban for over a month and the only difficulty I had was sending money home. I had to engage an auditor to do my accounts. He then presented them to the Inland Revenue, paid my Income Tax, got my passport stamped, went to a bank and lodged my money. Thanks be to God, they weren't on the breadline back in Malahide, at that time. One other problem was the backing group. In most cases they couldn't read music and, in some cases, they couldn't speak English so you can imagine the effect that had on my act and on my nerves. It's vital when you're playing a Violin or a Saxophone that your backing group can read your cue. As a consequence, I think *Danny Boy* aged during a few performances One could do without this hassle when an hour's show is

required. I swore to myself that in future I would bring my own pianist. A good pianist is worth his weight in gold.

I was performing at five-star hotels, where the food was fantastic and the service out of this world. My pyjamas were washed every morning and my suits pressed, and all on the house. The hotel managers thought a lot about their hotels' image and one manager was disappointed when I gagged one night about the hotel manageress who spent three hours knocking on my bedroom door until I eventually had to get up and let her out. I travelled from Joburg to East London where I met an Irish doctor who turned out to be a great friend. He took me everywhere with him, even out into the bush, when he was doing his rounds. It was most interesting to see his patients, with their children and old folks, lining up at the crossroads to receive their medicine. Some of them were healthier than myself but they still loved to get medicine, and they all loved the doctor greatly. After a few such journeys, I felt almost capable of doing a heart transplant myself.

From East London I went to Salisbury to perform at *Le Coq D'or Restaurant*, owned by Jack Smeaton, one of the nicest men I met on the African Tour. He invited me to stay with him at his Farm about eighty miles from Salisbury. I felt it rather incongruous travelling a dirt track into the bush, seated in a beautiful new mercedes. I'd have felt more at home on the back of an ass. When we arrived at his home, the large iron gate was opened by a native, who was heavily armed. There was an electrified wire meshing right around the farm and fortified huts placed at all vantage points. All the natives carried arms and every window in the house was netted. Jack explained to me that he was just taking security precautions. We had a meal and a couple of drinks and, before retiring, he handed me an automatic pistol and a repeating shotgun, saying: "As you're from Ireland, you'll know all about these". It would be no understatement to say I had an uneasy night. He was a good golfer and we played all the courses around Salisbury, but I'm afraid he was no match for my five-handicap golf. Unlike South Africa, the golf courses, hotels and cinemas were multiracial.

With Dickie Valentine and Hal Roach at Durban Airport, South Africa.

Another friendship I struck up was with Jack Ogston, a racing driver and car tester. One day he took me to the race track where we did one hundred and thirty miles an hour in a sports car. He frightened the heart out of me, even though I enjoyed it at the same time.

Before leaving Salisbury, I met an American one night in the hotel bar. I think he was the meanest man I ever met. There were five of us in the company and each of us, barring the American must have bought at least three rounds. At the end of the night, well under the weather, he turns to me and says: "You know I guess my forefathers came from Ireland" I replied: "You certainly must have had four fathers, because no one individual would take responsibility for you". All in all, I enjoyed my African trip and, I believe, it was a success. I returned home,

via Spain, where my daughter Patricia was living and spent some time with her and her husband. This was a most welcome break.

On returning home, I took a rest, and then opened at *The Central Pier*, Blackpool for the summer season, which lasted four months. Then I moved to Leeds where I was playing second fiddle to Max Wall. I had to share his dressingroom as rooms two to five were being repainted. We also shared the same hotel. After rehearsals, he told me to wait for him in his green Rolls Royce parked outside the theatre. My own car was out of action through abuse, no doubt. I went out, bought a paper and sat in the front seat, waiting for Max. After about fifteen minutes a uniformed chauffeur and a policeman approached me. I was interrogated and, finally, it was sorted out. I was sitting in Lady Chatsby's Rolls, whose chauffeur had gone window-shopping just when I came out of the theatre. Max's Rolls was further up the street. Talk about wealth. Two Rolls Royce of almost similar colour parked a few yards from each other, and my car, a semi-wreck in a local garage. Max was a great sport. I've only seen him once since then and that was on T.V. That episode with the cars just shows how people can easily be mistaken and reminds me of the fellow driving the girl home from a dance. He pulled into a lay-by and she said: "Why did you pull in here?" He told her that he'd got a flat. "Well" she said, "Why not go there instead."

I played a few weeks with Johnnie Ray and Victor Silvester before returning to Dublin for a Christmas Show.

The 'Sixties were starting well and I had a successful season at *The Aquarium*, Great Yarmouth, the following summer. Whenever, I went to London, I stayed with Bruce Forsyth at his home in Mill Hill.

In the early 'Sixties, showbusiness was booming, and all over England the top shows were becoming more and more spectacular. Even the show programmes were becoming more colourful and artistic, while still selling at sixpence. Looking back at *The Big Show* of 1963 which George and Alfred Black presented at *The Opera House*, Blackpool, all the vitality and excitement

Playing Old King Cole in Belfast Pantomime 1960.

return to my veins once more. The orchestra was under the direction of Jack Ansell and the show opened with *Keep It Swinging* with the Malcolm Goddard Dancers and the Derek Taverner Singers, followed by *Come Dance with Me*, Susan Lane and "Whacko" Jimmy Edwards. Next, on the programme came The King Brothers, followed by the Irish Buccaneer, Harry Bailey. Before the interval The Billy Cotton Band Show introduced Alan Breeze and Kathie Kay as well as The Leslie Roberts Silhouettes. After the interval, and for the first time in England, appeared America's Greatest Juggler, Frances Brunn, followed by Land of Song, which concentrated on the music of Italy. Variety was certainly the spice of life.

Travel was changing too and, both for speed and convenience, I regularly found myself airborne. I must admit I was never too happy in small planes. I had a rather terrifying experience once

while flying to the Isle of Man in a two-seater Piper as there was a fifty mile an hour headwind and our radio had conked out. Nevertheless there was a touch of class attached to arriving by plane and once or twice when I arrived at Dublin Airport in a six-seater, I felt that Dublin belonged to me, as I was ushered through the customs to catch a taxi home to Malahide. Every cloud has its silver lining.

The Theatre Royal in Dublin was always a great favourite of mine and I recall that I was appearing there with Ben Bono when I was approached by two shifty-looking characters. They were from Liverpool and, according to themselves, their mission in Ireland was to recruit pop singers. While I was dressing, I supplied them with all the information I had. After the second house, I went to my wardrobe to get some money to go over to Mulligans, and, yes, you guessed it, I had been caught again. They say that a fool and his money are easily parted. Our two hundred pounds had disappeared and one hundred had already been converted into dollars for my imminent trip to The Congo. The Gardai were called but they didn't give me much hope. Three days later, the phone rang at home. It was Dickie Rock's mother and she told me that two agents had approached Dickie with the aim of booking him to sing in England. All Dickie had to do was pay a 25 deposit. When she described them I knew that they were my two hobos. Dickie had an appointment to meet them at a hotel in Bray. Two non-pop singing detectives turned up instead of Dickie and the lads were arrested. A Garda Superintendent suggested that we'd let the younger of the two go. I agreed. The second culprit eventually got six months and I got a portion of my money back. As I said before, I'm a right idiot, at times.

But back to The Congo Trip. While playing *The Royal* I had suggested to the Lord Mayor of Dublin that a tour of the Irish troops serving in The Congo might be a viable proposition. The venture was also supported by the Editor of *The Evening Mail*. The U.N.O., New York agreed and arrangements were made. *The Mail* advertised for artists and we had the hell of a job

getting the right people. Conjurers and mime acts were virtually impossible to get or then again, maybe they just weren't patriotic. The U.N. limited us to five artists, so our touring troupe ended up with Edmund Brown, Monica Bonney, Dolly McMahon, Jackie Farn and myself.

We departed Dublin Airport where some army and government officials waved us goodbye. Our first stop was Brussels and here, our troubles started. We had left Dublin, full of enthusiasm, but the Brussels Airport officials kept putting obstacles in our way. They, apparently, didn't like anything connected with The Congo. Our plane was delayed for some time and I believe that it was only the threat of calling the Irish Ambassador that eventually got us through.

We travelled Firstclass. Everything was laid on, even slippers for our feet. We had champagne and the finest of cigars and they served us slices of toast and caviar. I think Edmund Brown summed it up when he said: "Would you believe it. 480 and they expect us to eat blackcurrant jam!"

Congo 1962. Getting to know the locals.

When we arrived at Leopolville, we got a true Irish welcome. General Sean McKeon and Major General Joseph Mobutu A.N.C Commander-in-Chief were there to greet us. That night we entertained the troops in the local hospital and then, we, in turn, were entertained by the General at his Quarters. He put his own plane, which was a most comfortable four-engined job, at our disposal, and that took us to Elizabethville Airport where we disembarked, exhausted and suffering from a hangover, only to be greeted by a pipe band playing in our honour. We felt very important arriving at our hotel. There's nothing to beat an Irish welcome.

The Opera House or *Theatre Centre* really surprised us. It was so modern, a huge building with a revolving stage and the orchestra came up on a lift, as indeed, did the grand piano. The Theatre was laid out in its own grounds, beautifully kept, as was the whole city, which looked like a miniature Manhattan. The

Congo – Bailey, ready for action.

whole city was packed with troops and we were supplied with our own plane and our own liaison officer. After a few shows, we flew on to Kimino, and were now slap bang in the heart of the Irish forces of the thirty-sixth battalion. Life was hectic there and it was most unusual to see the Irish playing Gaelic football and hurling against the Congolese.

The natives loved the Irish games, food, drink and dances. Each evening we went right into the countryside to entertain Indians, Moroccans, Swedes and Danes, not to mention the Irish. We ate so many types of curries that I've become a curry connoisseur ever since. At Albertville we were the only residents of a hotel, where some people had been murdered a short time before. We performed by candlelight, which wasn't by design, and I believe to this day that the candlelight only enhanced our performance. Water shortage was a slight setback at times but I got used to opening a can of beer to wet my shaving brush. Food was no problem because we usually ate each evening in the Officers' Mess.

If we couldn't get into a town because of enemy intervention, we performed on the back of large trailers. It was inspiring work

to see troops sitting on the tarmac surrounding the trailer, eyes and teeth flashing in the dusk and rifles and machine-guns across their knees. Whatever doubts I had about our little troop, were easily dissipated by their performance. They loved Monica Bonney and wanted her to dance for ever. Edmund Brown thrilled them, as if he was Caruso. Jackie Farn was a genius on the accordion. Just as well, because a piano wasn't always available, and Dolly McMahon never let us down. My own job was probably the most difficult. I stood and told jokes and our Liaison Officer translated them for the troops. At times, to prolong the agony, he retold my jokes in French to another officer, who then translated them to the troops. I had to stand, like a gombeenman, until eventually the laughter reached me, and then the liaison officer would turn to me and say: "You're doing terrific! , Tell them another". "Carry me out", how are you$\frac{2}{*l}$ However, one of my mime acts used to go down very well. I'd walk on the stage pretending to be a French painter at the seaside. As I started to paint, a beachball would land just in front of my easel and a lady would dash on to retrieve the ball. I spoke to her, in French, of course, and requested the pleasure of painting her. She agreed and I started to remove her clothes, particle by particle. She was allowed to hold the beachball over her head, while this was going on. Eventually I had her down to her bikini, in mime, don't forget, and they shouted for more. I refused saying: "Not at the prices you're paying to get in here". Then the lady ran off and I asked the audience if they'd like to see my painting of her. With shouts of "Yes" ringing in my ears, I'd turn the easel around and all that they could see was a painting of the beachball. It was a fulltime job I found looking after the two girls in the show. I had to rescue them on a few occasions from over-amorous approaches but I felt that it was my responsibility to do so.

There were some horrifying stories abounding in The Congo too. One bungalow we stayed in had just been the scene of a horrific murder where all six occupants had been slaughtered. We were also shown a compound where thirteen Italian Red

With Edmund Brown, the tenor, on a sightseeing tour during The Congo Trip.

Cross members had been tied to rings and then had their hands and feet cut off. The limbs were transported to a nearby baker who baked them in his ovens to make them edible for some natives. It was a regular occurrence to hear of bodies being found minus their hearts and livers. I promised myself that if I was to lose my heart, it would be to the beauty of the countryside and my liver would be to alcohol. Our greatest health problems came from the heat and so, we had to take pills by the dozens to alleviate that problem. The mosquitos didn't do us any favours either.

I think we all thoroughly enjoyed our Congo trip. Showbusiness people are adaptable human beings, anyway. I had to adapt many of my jokes to a new environment but that was no great problem. I told the story of the man with two wooden legs. When his house went on fire, he insisted on dashing back into the flames. He succeeded in putting the fire out and saved his house. Unfortunately, he was burned to the ground himself. There was another fellow who lived in a log cabin but he wasn't too bright. He always kept a load of timber in his attic just in case his house burned down. He felt that the timber in the attic would give him

a great start in rebuilding. Even the mother-in-law jokes could be adapted to the African scene. Did you hear the one about Murphy's mother-in-law$^{2}_{*l}$ She fell into a crocodile-infested river and before he could get her out, she had eaten three of them.

On my return from Africa, I had intended taking a little rest, but things just didn't work out that way and, before I knew it, I was out of my depth-again—literally speaking, this time.

ACT VIII

At Sea Once More

I'm always somewhat confused as to how I became Chief Entertainer on the great liner, *The Queen Elizabeth*. I think the whole idea started when my agent suggested that a holiday cruise from Southampton to New York would do me the world of good. However, as it turned out, it proved to be no relaxed holiday I can assure you. I ended up being engaged to do six weeks work on board the liner at a salary of sixty pounds a week and living in First-class accommodation. When I boarded at Southampton I was given a wonderful suite, so I left my luggage there and returned ashore to make arrangements for garaging my car, in my absence. On my return to the ship my luggage had been moved and nobody knew or seemed to care where my luggage now rested. After much negotiation, I eventually managed to meet the Chief Steward, and explain my situation. He was a very busy and important man, who was six foot four inches tall and married to a daughter of one of the directors of the Shipping Company. It was like having an audience with The Pope, without the Blessing. He informed me that it was he alone who allocated the cabins to passengers and he would choose which cabin I would occupy. I thanked him profusely for the audience and begged him to find my luggage in which, incidentally, he didn't seem to be particularly interested. At any rate, many hours later, I did receive both my luggage and a First-class cabin. Now, all I required was my itinerary, better known to us as my running

order. That apparently lay in the lap of the gods or, in this case, in the lap of the Chief Steward, which was the same thing, really.

There was no show the first night as we sailed into Cherburg. Most of the passengers disembarked in order to buy some cheap French wines and brandy. Even in the simple matter of disembarking I had troubles. At first they wouldn't permit me to leave the ship as, technically, I was a crew member and holding a seaman's card. But, it's hard to keep a Bailey down and harder still to restrain him at sea, so I had a look around the old town of Cherburg and returned to ship as if I was the Captain.

How do I find myself in so many awkward situations all my life. It turned out that I was expected to do a forty minute show, three shows a night, five nights a week, changing every night. The remainder of the show consisted wholly of dancers. I was always a strong swimmer but we were too far out from land!

We first played for the Third class. Most of the passengers here were quite ordinary individuals with the majority being from the Continent but many of them had very little English. Even those who had a smattering of English found it difficult to understand the many nuances of English humour. I wonder how Gaelic would have gone down? The second strata of society we played to was the Cabin class. They were situated at the opposite end of the liner and on a different deck level. We had to get permission to have all the inbetween doors unlocked and then carry our own props back and forth. I began to understand how prisoners felt on their way to solitary. The Cabin-class audience appeared to be made up of Mexicans, Puerta Ricans, and relatively poor Texans. I'm a naturally fast talker, so God help the slow-speaking Texans. Our problems were in no way lightened when we performed before the First-class passengers. They were situated in a huge ballroom, with a ceiling about eighty feet high. There was a stage at one end and the audience sat around in rather dimly-lit alcoves and it was extremely difficult to see them. A big change from a workingman's club in Burnley! The spotlights were piercing and I got the clear impression that I was talking to myself for most of my session. I'll have to admit, the

Wearing the famous comic, Grock's size 20 boots.

setting would have been ideal for Hamlet's "To be or not to be . . ." soliloquy.

The morning after our first shows, we were summoned to the Chief Steward's office. He kept us waiting outside his cabin for almost an hour. Maybe he was on the telephone to Above! When

he met us he informed the dancers that they'd have to change their costumes for their second act and that I'd have to change my material as it, in his opinion and knowledge, was too personal. One joke, in particular, would have to go immediately. That was the one I told about Casey, who was working on a labour-saving device—a rich old widow! He informed me that there were many "rich old widows" in the audience and that they were not at all pleased with me. I replied: "Well, that makes us even, as I'm not too pleased with them either". We had it out there and then. I informed him that if he wanted a change of script, he'd have to go out and do the act himself. I insisted that he should have requested copies of the script before I sailed and, that if he didn't like my act, he could send me back from New York—by Air. I don't think anybody had ever spoken to him like this before and he was totally taken aback. He made one final effort to salvage his case by requesting that I omit the gag about not being a Jew but being in the process of saving up to be one. "You know", he said "Charles Clore is in the audience". "I know", I said, "he congratulated me last night, after the show". Finally, with the wind knocked out of him, he requested a look at my other scripts. I told him that if he put a typewriter in my cabin, I'd be only too delighted to oblige. For the remaining six weeks while on board, I never saw the typewriter nor the Chief Steward again.

Now that the air was cleared, the Q.E. trip became quite pleasant and the show picked up as the nights went by. I made friends with the hairdresser in First class, who was a native of Finglas, in Dublin. Each time we docked in New York he took me out on the town. He knew New York better than Dublin. The first taxi-trip I took in the city I gave the driver a twenty-five cent tip. He gave me back fifty cents, accompanied by a choice remark.

On my second visit to New York I went along to the A.B.C. Studios and met Ed Sullivan, the well-known producer. I told him that I entertained on board the Q.E. liner, wore a saffron kilt and told him a few of my gags. He seemed impressed,

but don't all New Yorkers. He mentioned something about the possibility of a St. Patrick's Day date, but unfortunately, I never heard from him again. I probably just wasn't good enough, though I would have dearly liked an Ed Sullivan spot. I often wondered how my agent, who was one of the biggest in the world, wouldn't try and do something for me in America. However, life must go on. At the end of the six-week stint, boredom was setting in and my sleeping was suffering. I was always a poor sleeper, ever since my Circus days.

I never met the Q.E. Captain until our last trip home. He invited us to his cabin for a drink and turned out to be a very pleasant individual. When the ship docked at Southampton, I had to line up for my money along with the rest of the crew, and that took hours and hours. Nobody even said Goodbye. I've come to the conclusion that liner cruises are a very impersonal business. When the show's over, well, that's that!

One consolation of my Q.E. adventure was that each time I came back to Southampton, I stayed with my second daughter and her husband in Lee-on-Solent, Hampshire and was presented with Robert, my first grandson.

Back in England again, I had little time for regrets, I picked up my car and headed for *The Hippodrome* in Manchester where I was appearing with the American singer, Paul Anka. I arrived in the middle of a dispute concerning his musical backing. The local band refused to play and Paul didn't appear, so I was asked to do his time as well as my own. I knew I'd get a cool reception as the audience hadn't been informed that Paul Anka wouldn't be on. I went out, like a lamb to the slaughter, and said: "You'll have to put up with me and, for a start, I'm going to play a little number called Ankas Away". I succeeded in winning the audience over to some extent and the dispute was settled in time for the second house. The Manager was thrilled with me for saving what could otherwise have been a nasty situation. He promised me the world and what he wouldn't do for me in the future! Two days later the poor man was killed in a motor accident.

A comic pose often used in my billing.

Times were changing, and so was I. I could feel that the strain was beginning to tell. It wasn't so much doing the twice-nightly shows but the stress of travel, travel, travel. Morecambe to Blackpool to Ayr, in Scotland was all taken for granted in a week's travel. After all, even my car was constantly under stress. Since 1946 I had gone through eight new cars in England and three in Ireland. Without realising it, that's where a lot of your money goes too. There are, of course, things like Income Tax and Accountants also. At any rate, travel was taking its toll on my enthusiasm and ambition, not to mind, my health. Have you ever tried playing Newcastle-Upon-Tyne one week, then driving to Cardiff the following week and back to Sunderland for the Sunday. Some agents must take responsibility also. Occasionally, they get mixed up and send you to the wrong city or wrong club. You get dressed for a Show and then the Club Secretary informs you: "You're not here, tonight, Mate". This is a dual problem,

of course, because some other Club Secretary is saying at the same time but, in more angry fashion: "Where the hell is Bailey? " Some Club Secretaries are rather ingenious people. They don't tell you that you're not on in their Club until you've finished your act. This happened to me once or twice in Wales. The workingmen's clubs were rough there. Usually the pianist can't read, the mike doesn't work and, if they don't like your first act, you're paid off there and then. You take what cash you're offered. You're not going to argue. What artist wants bad publicity? Club Secretaries come and go and they resent paying artists, with comments like: "It would take me a month to earn that!"

However, I'm getting morbid, I think. I'm not a moaner at heart and, by God, I'm far from finished yet. It's the mid-Sixties, and there's a world out there awaiting to meet 'Carry-me-Out' Bailey.

ACT IX

On the Road Again

Golf is a great therapy and I was soon again winning prizes in the Vaudeville Golfing Society. Don't think it's easy to win prizes in showbusiness competitions. Many artists play off very low handicaps, probably because they're normally free to practise during the day. But many of them are very dedicated golfers, too.

Its always nice to play in a show which carries a popular act. I recall playing with Charlie Kunz at *The Theatre Royal*,in Portsmouth. He used to be billed as 'Radio's Wizard of the Piano'. I remember also playing second to Howard Keel at *The Moss Empire Theatre*, Newcastle, where he was billed as 'The Famous M.G.M. Singing Star, Screen Personality of many of Hollywood's greatest films including: *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Showboat*, *Calamity Jane and Rose Marie*. They really knew how to put you in lights in those days.

While playing Liverpool, I got a call to go down to London to do a one-nighter television show. As I'd only be staying for one night I decided to use accommodation laid on by the Knights of Columbanus. I was given a small room and next morning when I walked into the diningroom for breakfast there were dozens of clergy men already there. The waitress recommended the kippers and I agreed. Then realising that they might make me feel ill at my morning television show, I called after her: "Cancel the kippers, I'll have bacon and egg instead". All conversation

stopped in the diningroom and every clerical eye focussed on me. I hadn't realised that it was Friday, I nearly lost my membership!

On my way back up North, I did a *Good Old Days* show for Barney Coleman in Leeds.

That summer season I spent at *The Holiday Camp* at Rhyl. It was the usual summer type of show with a very good snake act, a ventriloquist act, a charming acrobatic dancer, a few singers and myself. About this time my booking manager, Sydney Grace, retired to Malta and that put more pressure on myself.

A new club opened in Wakefield and I was booked for two weeks. There was a pseudo Irishman on for the previous two weeks so I decided to go over on the Saturday just to see what material he was using. It was late in the evening when I arrived so I booked into a hotel opposite the station, left my luggage and drove on to the Club to catch his act. He didn't use any of the material I was using and after the show he invited me to dinner. I returned to my hotel to find that I had been allotted a topmost room and the hotel had no fire escape. Even the light in the room wasn't working. The room was cold and so was the bed. To counteract the dampness, I wore my trousers and two jumpers and used my overcoat as an extra blanket. I decided that I'd find a new hotel the next morning. I never slept a wink that night so at five in the morning I escaped to my car, which was warmer than the hotel and shivered there until I found a cafe open for breakfast. I spent most of the day getting the ice out of my bones and eventually opened at the new club at eight o'clock. That night my act died. The Manager informed me that the previous pseudo Irish Comic had already used all my gags. I said he didn't use them because I had heard him the night before. His reply shocked me: "Ah, he knew you were in so he just changed his act while you were there". I thought to myself: "The miserable rat, and to think I had dinner with him".

I was appearing at *The Kingsway Club* at Southport when the Golf Open Championship was being played at Royal Birkdale. Many of the golfers had tables booked at the Club for dinner, including Lee Trevino and Billy Casper. I believe they were the

guests of John Letters, the Scottish club maker, a millionaire who had flown down from Scotland in his own plane. He also owned a huge yacht and a Rolls Royce but all this wealth was compensated for by the fact that he also owned a great sense of humour. It was a hectic night. I cracked gags at Letters and Trevino's expense, and Trevino, in reply, came on stage and took over the show. I ended sitting in the audience at the golfers' tables. What a line of patter he had!' If his golf failed him, he'd never be out of work. Mr. Letters invited me to the golf match next morning and this was after a champagne breakfast. We followed Trevino around and he gagged his way through eighteen holes better than any comedian could have done. He invited me to lunch in the Club House which was a great honour for me. We swopped ties and he promised to send me three woods, which he did. He is a marvellous character with a wonderful sense of humour.

Week in, week out, I continued on the Club circuit when I would have preferred to be playing the Golf Club Circuit. I did a week with Val Doonigan at *The Pavilion*, Glasgow. We played some golf together and he invited me to join his London Show a fortnight later. In the meantime I drove down to London to rehearse for a Butlins' Show at Pwllheli in Wales. In fact unknown to almost everybody, I had a second reason to be in London. I had a serious operation in Hammersmith Hospital but, naturally, the public had to be kept in the dark. Who is going to book you from a hospital bed? After the operation, I did my driving, seated on a rubber cushion. I was also suffering from a kidney ailment, had a blood content in my urine and had a tumour in my vocal chord. You should have seen me when I was living! I opened at Pwllheli on a Saturday, did two shows, left there at three in the morning, drove to Chester Airport, caught a plane to London and got a taxi to the Shepherds' Bush Empire. All this travel when I should have been recuperating. Don't let anybody convince you that showbusiness is easy. It may appear so on your T.V. screen, but there are many aches and pains involved before that smile appears on your T.V. screen.

Anyway, I fixed myself a hotel and arrived for rehearsals with Val and Company. I hadn't brought my violin as I had arranged to do an act with a guitar. Two guitars were made for me, one for the show and one for rehearsal. This is how the act should have worked out. I would be just about ready to play my guitar when Val would ask me what number I intended playing. I inform him but he says "You can't play that number. I'm going to play that myself". I tell him that this is his misfortune, put my foot on a chair, miss it and fall on my back while throwing the guitar in the air. The guitar was meant to break into smithereens, but would it oblige?. No!. It was made of palm-wood I think and defied all our efforts to break it. I soon got tired of falling on my back and then the Producer had the brilliant idea of me falling on top of the guitar. I tried it. The guitar won and I hurt my back. The Producer said: "Try it again, Harry". The language soon deteriorated and the whole idea had to be scrapped. What one goes through just to earn a few bob! Eventually, I had to borrow a violin from the Orchestra. I was allotted four minutes and the act flopped. Not surprising, considering that it wasn't the scheduled act. I really felt mentally and physically exhausted and couldn't speak. I went to the dressingroom and lay on a settee. Neither Val nor the Producer spoke to me, so I returned to my hotel, asked for an alarm call, paid for the night and was off back to Chester at six in the morning. I picked up my car, drove to Pwllheli, did a rehearsal and then two shows. I swore to myself that there must be an easier way. The only reason I'm telling you this story is to emphasise the fact that when you are in the limelight, you deserve it and should, accordingly be thankful. I worked that long summer in Wales, organising competitions during the day and performing at night. I was staying in the local village and when I went into the local pub, the boys who were standing there talking in English, would now start talking in Welsh. I've often thought of Harry Seacombe's song: *There's a welcome in the Hillside*. Well, I failed to find it.

After Wales I returned home for a few weeks. I needed the rest and wanted to see the family. A lot of my problems were

increased by the fact that I was performing in England and living in Ireland. This idea of commuting or shuttling back and forth never appealed to me. The availability of work in my line was only to be found across the water. Maybe I should have moved house, yet I loved Malahide and so did my family. I know that they suffered too in the whole process of occasional visits home. Each time I came home I always tried to bring some unusual present with me. Maybe this was my conscience keeping me in line.

I returned to Manchester and took up the Club circuit again. I was booked by a fellow who had convinced himself that he was an agent. I was booked for three Clubs within a forty mile radius each night. That's O.K. if your schedule is absolutely correct and the time factor is right. My potential agent convinced me that there were no problems. My first Club was in Sheffield. As I changed, the concert secretary informed me that I was doing three acts in his club. I told him that he was wrong and showed him my itinerary, which read 8.30—9.00 p.m. at his club, 9.45 p.m. at the next club and 11 o'clock at the last club. He said: "If you don't do three spots here, you're no good to me". I packed my bag, picked up my violin and walked out. As I left, he shouted after me: "It's the last club you'll play in this town". The same thing happened at other venues. At Doncaster, I arrived on a Saturday and the Boss told me that I should have been on the night before. He even showed me my billing pinned up inside the door. I produced my itinerary which clearly read: "*The Sheaf O'Wheat Club*, Doncaster — Saturday". The Boss summed it all up, quite succinctly, when he said: "That bloke booking you needs to have his head examined, and fast".

Illness was beginning to make me a little irritable and by 1967, I started to lessen my work load. I did a few radio and T.V. shows in Manchester and also did a series with Jimmy Clithero there. I did another *Good Old Days* and even played golf with The Bachelors. John Stokes put me up for the night. Then I was booked for a summer season at Mosney.

My wife and family were delighted to learn that I was coming

home for a whole season. I found it strange myself having been abroad since 1946. At first I found it even difficult to converse and I just didn't seem to know what to talk about. I appeared to have lost touch with all local and topical events. But time changed all that.

Mosney was a pleasure to work. The Camp Manager was Topper Brown for whom nothing was too much trouble. He went out of his way to please and no matter what scene or prop you required Topper would acquire it. I drove to Mosney from Malahide to rehearse for the new season and to meet the rest of the show. I was delighted to see Vernon Hayden there who would readily feed me my gags and Pat King, whom I hadn't met since *The Theatre Royal* days. Pat could write music as readily as you or I could write a letter and twice as quickly at that. I knew I'd have no trouble in his direction. I also knew all his band and I felt immediately at home. There was also Lorcan Burke, with the old bland smile and welcome, a man of great theatrical experience. Yes! things were looking up, alright. I was at home and it would be a wonderful season.

Mosney was hard work, but I expected that. I had to do eight or ten revues, changing each evening. The dressingroom was small, about seven by five feet and the walls were plastered with scripts for each night's acts. Props and costumes littered the room, but it was still good to be playing at home. Problems will occur no matter where you're performing and my uncanny knack of unearthing them didn't desert me when I came to Mosney.

On one occasion during a Foreign Legion sketch, Vernon Hayden, an Officer was putting three of us through our drill. The stooge, who had a white face, looked confused and lost. Vernon asked me if he was just plain stupid and I replied: "Obviously. Why else would he come to Mosney on holidays". "Is he ill?" said Vernon, looking at the stooge's white face. I replied: "It's either that or maybe he had rissoles for dinner". We always had rissoles on a Wednesday and many campers complained about them. The audience laughed but the Camp Chef didn't. He kicked up hell and threatened to resign if I didn't make a

public apology. The following night I said: "Remember that soldier who was sick. Rissoles didn't cause his sickness. I think it was a bad pint he had". The Chef withdrew his resignation threat just as the Bar Manager handed his in. It's hard to please everybody. There was an Opinion Box at Mosney and when some of the older members of the audience didn't understand some of my gags, they put it in writing and posted it in the Opinion Box. This meant that I had to explain my gag to the Camp Manager, the following day. It's a funny old life, I hear you say, but, as Oscar Wilde put it: "Always forgive your enemies, nothing annoys them so much". After all, they lock up juries and let out prisoners on bail, don't they? The Baileys must have come from the sea, originally, because, like a fish, I'm sure I'd never get into trouble if I kept my mouth shut. I recall that the idea of changing the red coats to green coats was in vogue at one time in Mosney, but Sir Billy Butlin decided that one wouldn't be able to see a green coat sitting on the grass, so red remained the Butlin colour.

Halfway through the Mosney season I became ill again and had to spend some days in the Meath Hospital, where they discovered two stones in my kidney. When the summer season finished, I returned to England but had to return to the Meath every three months for a check-up. Once while driving from Liverpool to Blackpool, I suffered severe pains and ended up spending a week in the Victoria Hospital. Luckily, I passed the stones and was back on the road again a few days later. They say that women, priests and poultry never have enough. You can add Bailey to that list.

As the 'Seventies were about to dawn, I returned to Dublin to do *The Maureen Potter Show* at *The Gaiety*. I had only ten minutes and that didn't suit me at all, having been used to half-hour and longer stints in the Clubs in England. The first week I died, but really the lowest ebb being the turn of the tide, I recovered in the second week. Fred O'Donovan asked me to do a spot in *The Dolphin*, which I did for a week. Peggy Dell was on the piano so, naturally, I needed no rehearsal.

I spent Christmas in a night spot in Chester and remained on there for four weeks. Then back to Dublin to do a show for Radio Eireann, called *Bailey's Band Box*. I wasn't happy with it. Somehow it just didn't click but, then again, I've always been my own greatest critic. Sound seemed to have been the greatest single problem but I suppose no soundman should have been asked to cope with the many sound effects I required, which included aeroplanes crashing, a horse race, a greyhound race, a hunt with bugles and God knows what else? When the show was recorded, I invited the No. 1 Army Band to a pub for a drink. It was after hours but we were given a room upstairs and had a night to remember.

On returning to England I played Ayr with Patrick O'Hagan. Business was good the first week but then three Scottish soldiers, all from Ayr, were shot dead in Belfast. This put some damper on our show which was billed as *Ireland on Parade*. Bookings were cancelled and remarks were made about us earning a living in Scotland and their soldiers being shot in Ireland.

When I returned home I did a short tour of Irish Clubs which included a Limerick Roadhouse, Bray, Balbriggan, *The Boot Inn* and *The Green Isle*. Then I was booked for another South African Tour. I think it was Victor Hugo who said that: "Forty is the old age of youth, and fifty is the youth of old age". Well I was touching sixty and beginning to feel it, especially as my health wasn't the greatest at this time but growing old isn't half so bad when you think what is the alternative.

On my way to South Africa I had some trouble at Heathrow when the customs men discovered a large automatic revolver in my suit case. I used it for firing blanks during one of my acts. Eventually, I was allowed through but I never saw the revolver again.

I opened in Salisbury at *Bret's Night Club*. The backing group were good musicians but couldn't read music which didn't help me when I got requests for Irish songs. After the opening night, the Press gave me a good write-up, but suggested that as far as politics were concerned, I should mind my own business. I had

a number of gags about Mr. Smith's Government, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Goodman. Mr. Smith's secretary said to him, one day: "There are two gentlemen waiting to see you, the Archbishop and Lord Goodman. Who will you see first? " Mr. Smith replied: "I'll see the Bishop first. I'll only have to kiss his ring". This resulted in four policemen paying me a visit to inspect my scripts.

I did two spots at the Club, one from 6 to 7 p.m. and the other from midnight to almost 1 a.m. To fill up the time between acts, I walked the streets of Salisbury, which was a beautiful clean garden city. By the time I left I knew the price of every suit and every shirt in every window in Salisbury.

I flew from Salisbury to Durban and played four weeks at a five-star hotel. I met an old Irishman there who literally became my Patron. He was a millionaire and drove a huge cadillac. He brought a party to the show every single night for four weeks and opened a private bar each night after the show. I must admit he virtually killed me with kindness. It was damn hard to try and keep sober but it was always my belief that the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it.

My next stop was Capetown and I arrived there at the time of the "big winds". It was difficult to cross a street without being swept off your feet. I was playing in the Penthouse of a forty storey super hotel. On my first night there, I looked out my bedroom window and a large clock in the distance seemed to be swaying too and fro. I thought it was a hangover from Durban but was reassured the following morning when I was informed that the hotel was built on an axle which allowed it to sway slightly during the "big winds".

The early show in Capetown was supposed to catch the people who lived out of town on their way home from their offices. It didn't work and I often played to tiny audiences. My next stop was Kenya and I opened on New Year's Eve at the *New Stanley Hotel* in Nairobi. As I walked on stage, dressed in my kilt, I was hit in the face by a soup roll. I don't mind being hit during an act or, indeed, after an act, but I don't take kindly to being hit

before I act. A voice from the darkened audience shouted: "Get back to Ireland". I replied: "I will, but not tonight". The voice again shouted: "What about the I.R.A.?" I replied: "I.R.A. Oh, yes, I know, I'll Remember Africa". The show continued but it wasn't easy going. The Manager later explained to me that it was a Captain Walker and friends who were causing the trouble. His father had been an estate owner in Co. Westmeath and his home had been raided for firearms. The next evening I received an anonymous phone call from somebody with an Irish accent who promised me that I would have no more heckling from Captain Walker and friends. The Captain had apparently been informed that if he interrupted my show again his house would be burned down. I can assure you I was a little nervous on my next appearance, but I never heard any more about the incident.

One of the problems I found touring Africa was that you really needed your own car. Without a car your freedom was greatly curbed. I did meet some nice people there too. I recall a Mr. Fish in Capetown, who invited me to his home. He ran a school for Bridge players, charged his guests a hefty fee, gave them lessons, tea and biscuits and made a fortune. Isn't it funny how some people can think up ideas to make a living while others like myself, have to travel the world in search of it. But, as I said before, there are many things in life I don't understand. Would somebody please explain to me how it is that if you can't spell a word in the first place, how do they expect you to find it in a dictionary?

My health was deteriorating and I was being advised to slow down Advice, of course, is seldom welcome and those, like myself, who need it most, like it least.

In the early 'Seventies, I continued to play Clubs here and there and shuttled back and forth to England. It was always my motto that greatness is not achieved by never failing, but by rising every time you fall. In '73 and '74, I travelled up and down England and often the venues were over 200 miles apart. In late '74, I came home to do an Irish T.V. Show called *Joking Apart.* In the show were Chris Casey, Noel V. Ginnity, Danny Cummins, Hal Roach, Cecil Sheridan and myself. The show was

"Joking Apart" T.V. Show. In company with Noel V. Ginnity, Chris Casey and Danny Cummins.

filmed in the Autumn but didn't appear on screen until the following Summer. Naturally, this delay didn't help because punchlines depend on topical events. In general, I felt that the show was a flop. We had the same scene all through and we wore the same suits. The show was televised at *The Olympia* and the audience sat halfway up the stalls and were out of distance of the microphones, so that there was no audience reaction. It also didn't help having the cameras in a set position. If you were off the standing mike you couldn't be heard and, on one occasion, I did a fall and fell right out of the picture. Even the final edited version of the show I felt was disappointing.

Shortly afterwards the stage frontage of *The Olympia* fell down. it's a pity that didn't happen during our show. It might have got a laugh!

While I'm on the topic of Television, many people have asked me how I reacted to T.V. I'll put it this way. I prefer live audiences. I've always found that by the fourth rehearsal, cameramen and technicians have naturally got sick of hearing the gags. When it comes to the real thing, they look pretty fed up and this feeling transfers itself to the artist. Even though I was one of the first ever Irish acts on T.V., I always felt that I didn't have the technique for writing T.V. scripts. Comedy, I believe, is for the ear and not for the eye. The artist must always change to suit T.V. and not vice versa, as I would have hoped. Again, when you're used to doing half-hour shows, it's very difficult to adapt to a 3-minute slot which is the normal television time allotment. I found that I enjoyed the *Old Time Music Hall* programmes on television mostly because I was allowed 14 minutes on each programme. Another pitfall I found with television was that I could never judge the mood of a T.V. audience. Overall, I must say that T.V. has done a lot for my education. Everytime somebody turns on the set, I go into the next room and read a book.

By 1975, my touring days in England were over and ill-health was succeeding in limiting my travel. But where there's life, there's hope.

ACT X

My Final Curtain

In early 1975, one wintry night, I spent hours looking for a club some thirty miles from Birmingham. I caught a bad cold and, after a few days, was forced to retire to bed. The doctor informed me that I was very ill and on the verge of a complete breakdown. However, after one week, I was back working and lasted out another three weeks to complete my engagements. Little did I realise, but this was to be my last tour in England.

I returned home to recuperate, kept losing my voice and finally, collapsed. I was taken to St. Joseph's Hospital in Raheny, and from there, to Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital. Obviously, I had suffered a stroke, couldn't speak and lost the use of my right leg and arm. However, I survived. For weeks after, I suffered from double vision and my memory was fuddled as well. After some time I was allowed home, and slowly, but surely, I recovered. My speech was slightly affected, double-vision returned occasionally, but my biggest problem was my memory. I seemed to have lost the ability of remembering things in sequence. Isolated events, dates and jokes created no problem, but to tie them together, I found very difficult.

You can't keep a good man down, and, in less than two years, I was back performing. I recall being invited to do an act for the prisoners at Arbour Hill. Driving there alone was a major headache. Cars appeared to be coming at me from all angles, but as long as I kept one eye closed, the cars all stayed on their own side of the road. I remember the audience seemed to be

sitting on each others' heads. Visits to the Eye and Ear Hospital, the Meath Hospital and St. Vincent's Hospital eventually cured my double-vision. Also helping me on the road to recovery were the regular hospital visits of my wife, Ben Bono and his wife, who is my sister, of course, and Andy Bannon with his regular supply of whiskey.

In 1977, I played a number of Clubs around Dublin, with mediocre success, I think. I was asked to stand in for Hal Roach, who was late returning from America, and I played a hotel venue where the audience was mostly American. I did quite well here and, as I was leaving after the show, I was handed an envelope which I didn't open until I arrived home. It contained ten pounds. My wife was asleep. I didn't wake her as I didn't want two upset people in the house.

My wife went to America and Canada in 1978 and visited our two daughters and two sons and their children. She deserved a break, after putting up with me for so long. At home, I forgot about the stage and instead looked after the garden, mowed the lawn, had a pint in the village and renewed my interest in golf. Having a pint reminds me of Phillis Dixie and her husband's act. He'd walk on stage: "Have you ever been in love?" She'd reply: "Brother, I've been everywhere". He'd say: "It takes seventeen pints of beer to make me sleep. At least I think it does, I've never been in bed long enough to find out". Phillis asks him: "Why do you drink beer?" and he answers: "What else can I do with it?". He'd continue with: "I read so much about the evils of drink that I decided to give up reading" and, looking at his audience, he'd say: "Etiquette is learning to yawn with your mouth closed". They were a good act. He was less than five foot tall and always wore a check suit and tophat.

In August 1978, the VATS. informed me that I was to be the recipient of their Annual Award. I was thrilled. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Paddy Belton T.D., invited me to the Mansion House. It was a wonderful evening for my family and friends, and the following morning I was interviewed on Radio Dublin. The presentation of the VATS Award took place in the Shelbourne

Lord Mayor of Malahide 1978.

Hotel on Friday 20th October 1978, and, I must say, I regard it as being one of the highlights of my career. The programme for the night was fantastic, with Jack Cruise, Austin Gaffney, Sonny Knowles, Cecil Sheridan and Hal Roach only filling up part of the entertainment. I can assure you that the Award is a very coveted one with the profession. Not surprising, when you hear that previous recipients included Maureen Potter, Noel Purcell, Peggy Dell, Cecil Sheridan and Val Doonican. I was presented with a trophy and a portrait of myself, both of which I treasure dearly. I never knew I had so many friends at home, and abroad. Telegrams arrived at the Shelbourne from Max Bygraves, Harry Secombe, Dickie Henderson, Roy Castle, Dick Emery and dozens more. Members of my family who could not make it, including my grandchildren abroad also sent telegrams. What a night it was! I finished up playing the violin and even amazed myself.

By the time the 'Eighties had arrived, I was back to good health again or maybe, I should say, relatively good health. I was doing the odd charity show now and again and playing eighteen holes of golf two or three times a week. I was doing so well that somebody said to me one day: "Harry, we'll make you Taoiseach yet". I replied: "Don't be silly, Mrs. Haughey would never marry me".

In 1982, I won a Christmas Hamper at Malahide Golf Club and it wasn't in a raffle. Need I add, that I wasn't playing off a 5 or 6 handicap, as I was wont to do. I wonder would I make a few bob if I put an advert, in the local paper:

Old age pensioner, one foot in the grave, recovering from stroke, suffering from double-vision and loss of memory challenges young, hale and hearty golfers to 1 *a match. Able to play on pension days only.*

Ah! there's no sense in being greedy! The 2 or 3 a week I win at the moment will do me fine.

I enjoy doing local Charity Shows. The Malahide Historical Society asked me to a stint at their annual get-together, each

year. I wonder is there a message in this? Am I becoming an antique artifact or a museum exhibit? I must say I was thrilled when the local historians invited me to the Official Opening of their new Museum and, later, ran a *Harry Bailey Exhibition*.

Now that I have time to listen to the radio and watch television, I'm sometimes amazed at what I hear and see. One morning I heard someone on the radio advertising photography: "You can have a photographic portrait taken at the convenience of your own home". God Almighty! who wants to pose, sitting on a toilet seat?" On T.V., I heard that "Owing to the fuel crisis, Corporation Officials are advised to take advantage of their secretaries between 12 noon and 2 p.m." and, at the launch of a new ship in Belfast: "The Admiral's daughter smashed a bottle of champagne over her stern, as she slid down the slipway". What atrocious behaviour? What is the world coming to, I ask you$_{*!}^{?}$. The Press is no better. I read lately where, at a Bridge Contest, Mr. & Mrs. Buckley stuck to their gins all day, and won out at the end. In the same paper, a sports reporter said that George Murphy was badly injured just before halftime and lay writing in the middle of the field for ten minutes. Even the historical columnists seem to be cracking up. I read that the early Britons made their houses of mud and there was rough mating on the floor. I think the Miscellaneous Columns are the worst, especially when you read adverts like "Bachelor (40) Non-driver. Would accompany same on Car Tour" and "For Rent, Hall, with Kitchen and Toilet, Can seat 100" I went to a Dogshow lately and, on the programme, it said that: "The Judge will have the power to order off any dog that commits a fragrant error".

I enjoy the many gimmicks used in today's advertising. I did an advert. once for the E.S.B. There was a photo of me, in all the National papers, lying in a bath, soaking in suds, and smoking a cigar. The caption read: "For only 20 the E.S.B. will land you in hot water" Someone told me that some time earlier, when advertising cookers, they had an advert which read: "Don't kill your wife with work. Let the E.S.B. do it". I doubt if that's true. You can't believe everybody, you know.

June 1984 was a bleak month for me. Sadly, my wife died, just four months short of our fiftieth wedding anniversary. It's ironic, really, that now when I have time for my wife and children, she's gone and four of my five children are abroad. However, my wife has left me many happy memories and I must visit my children in the near future.

Memories are wonderful, be they happy or sad. I now have the time to indulge myself in my world of reminiscences. Having spent over 60 years on the road, there's no shortage of memories. Today, people talk about diversifying, I think I'd qualify as a "diversifier", having been acrobat, trapeze artist, strongman, clown, comedian, straight actor, violinist, saxophonist, cinema-operator, bandleader, tent-master and functionary in other areas I've forgotten about. Memories flood back from over the years and some return, unfortunately, disguised as nightmares. When you've played in halls where the ceilings were so low that the cockroaches had round shoulders, there are bound to be nightmares. I'll never forget the time when a false rumour reached me in England, that Jimmy O'Dea had died in Dublin. I, immediately, sent a telegram of condolence to Harry O'Donovan. Imagine my shock when I got a telegram back from Jimmy himself. It read: "The only place I ever died was in Burnley".

A recurring nightmare too was the Pantomime *Old King Cole* in Belfast. It cost 27,000 to produce and ran to a three-hour show. As it turned out there were sixteen scenes too many and I played it with a severe dose of laryngitis. I've woken up at night, recalling *The Hippodrome* in Birmingham when the amplification failed for Emile Ford and the Checkmates. Chaos reigned for the first half of *Startime*, and despite our best efforts, the mike remained resolutely dumb for Emile all night.

A cold sweat breaks out when I remember my Strangulation Act during my Circus days. I used to twist a rope around my neck and call on two members of the audience to take each end of the rope and see if they could strangle me in one minute. There was really no problem as long as both volunteers were reasonable men and took the pull gradually. My nightmare recalls

The Green in Ballinasloe. A big fellow obviously never heard of power-sharing and would indeed have authenticated the title of the act if I hadn't got to him first. He'll also remember that night, I'm sure.

The Rotunda in Dublin, now the Ambassador Cinema, also helps to send the odd shiver down my spine. If the Rotunda didn't make stars, it may have made saints. During my cine-variety days there I was pelted with orange peel. It has put me off fruit ever since.

Just mention Glasgow to me and I'll change colour. At *The Empire Theatre*, the Follies Striptease Show had to be cut short with four acts still to go. Glasses, icecream blocks and eggs were showered on us, and, not necessarily in that order. All the audience wanted was the Amateur Striptease Contest. One brave man, the pianist, stuck it out on his own for fifteen minutes and

With my future wife, Bea Bissett, Malahide 1933.

even succeeded in playing The National Anthem. He was a lucky man it wasn't the Last Post he played!

Despite the many headaches and heartaches, the pleasant and happy memories easily outweigh the nightmares.

I have lovely memories of 1930 when the Circus programme cost twopence and that included a songbook. I can still hear my mother, Carrie May, singing *Spanish Rose*. The Congo is relived with Edmund Brown and myself, on the steps of the departing Viscount, singing: *I Give You all a Last Goodbye*" and Jackie Farn playing the *Warsaw Concerto*.

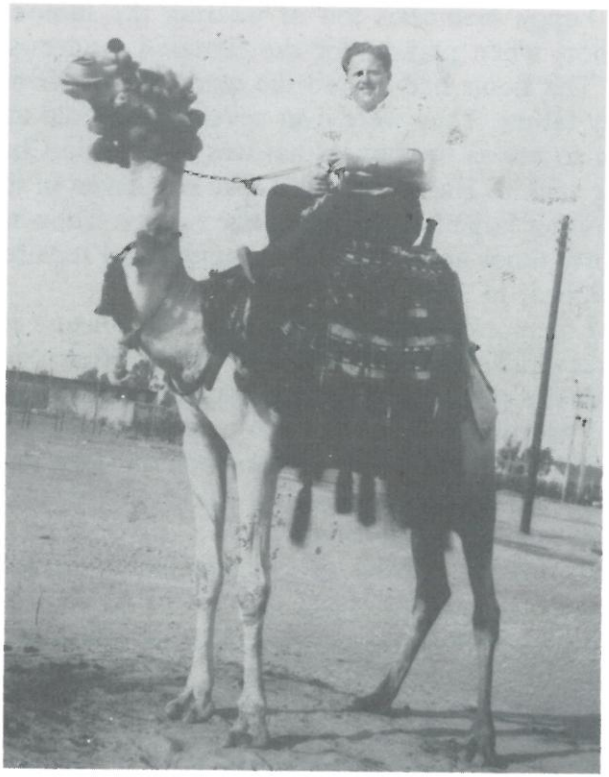
Yes, indeed, the hiccoughs fade into insignificance compared to the glorious happy bygone days. At T*he Ritz Cinema*in Wigan, before an audience of 2,400, and billed as "Ireland's Prime Minister of Fun", it was a joy to sing *If Your Mother Comes from Ireland, You'll Get a Job at Wimpeys*.

I have happy memories too of wearing the famous clown Grock's boots when playing for the Eamonn Andrews Revue Company. The boots had toured the world before Grock gave them to my father. They were over seventy years old and were as valuable to me as the bowler hat was to Charlie Chaplin or the walking stick to Harry Lauder. I take size seven in shoes, so they were rather large for me, being size twenty. They had been repaired forty times and a cobbler in Sunderland repaired them for me to appear in Pantomime.

My best memories must identify with *The Theatre Royal*, n Dublin. I recall *The Bells are Ringing* with Hal Roach and Mick Eustace. What a treat it is to hold an audience of over 4,000 in the palm of your hand! Who wants to be paid in a situation like that? Once while wheeling Jimmy Campbell on stage in a pram, it overturned and injured my leg. But who could blame Jimmy? After all, he was Little Boy Blue.

There are even memories of evenings which started out as nightmares and ended as pleasant dreams. In Achill Island, our show was billed to start at 8 o'clock. Our first customer didn't turn up until 10.30 p.m. and this was an old lady who informed us that we'd be full before the night was out. She was right. By midnight we had a full house, all waiting eagerly for *Sweeney Todd*. For the rest of our stay in Achill, we had a midnight start each night. The customer is always right!

By 1986 my feet were itching again, so I went to London to my daughter for Christmas. Now that the bug had bitten, I was off travelling again in the summer of '87. I flew to Toronto to stay with my sons for a week and then flew to Baltimore, Maryland to stay with my daughter and her husband on the Chesapeake Bay. Next it was on to Atlanta, Georgia to my eldest daughter and family to see for the first time my four great-grandchildren. From there it was back to Canada for another week with my sons, Brian and Alan and finally, home to Malahide. A fair bit of travel for a 78-year-old man, I hear you say but, after all, I spent my life travelling and, of course, this time there wasn't the stress of performing. A leisure trip doesn't take as much out of you as does a business trip.



Happy Memories of 1953.

You know I often wonder where I spent my money and, I suppose, a large amount of it must have gone on travelling. I certainly earned plenty in my day but it disappeared as easily or, I should say, more easily than I received it. At least, I acquired a lovely home in Malahide and educated five children. Paying income tax and surtax in England and Ireland also bored holes in my coffers, and maintaining a home in Ireland while keeping myself in England wasn't an exercise conducive to accumulating a fortune. But there's more to life than money which reminds me of the story of the young man up in Court for not maintaining

The one car I loved. My Bugatti c. 1920.

his wife. When the Judge had heard the case, he turned to the young man and said: "I am going to make an order allotting your wife twenty-five shillings a week". "Good", said the young man, "Thanks, your Honour. I'll try and send her a few shillings myself, too."

In my retirement, I often ask myself: "What have I learnt from life?" One answer certainly comes through. Your can't please everybody. In some clubs in England and Wales, where the bouncers were throwing people in, Managers often abused me because I wasn't blue enough. Meanwhile, at home in Ireland, I was often accused of being too blue. How do they want me to appear? Black and blue, is it? God only knows I was bruised often enough! They say life is a mystery. I well believe that. After performing at *The National Concert Hall* in Dublin, I, Harry, the Comedian, was met by a friend after the show, and do you know what he said to me: "You were great, Harry, it took me all my time not to laugh". That really takes the biscuit!

In 1988, I still did the odd charity show or a spot at a local party. I often sit at home and admire my odd-shaped fiddle and handsome green jacket and orange kilt with its touch of white — the Irish colours, of course. When I get tired of admiring myself,

I stroll down the Village and have a pint in my good friend Jack Gibney's pub or Smyth's, or Duffy's or the G.A.A. Club or, indeed maybe, when I meet bad company, in all four. I'm not really able to drink that much anymore, so quite often I settle for a coffee.

It's the friendship and the crack I enjoy most. Frank McSwiggan always keeps me updated with topical events. It's a time to reminisce with friends, some of whom I've known for nearly fifty years. The stories are good too.

In 1948 a local man, Ned Owens took a cartload of cabbage to the Dublin market. He sold the cabbage and retired for a few drinks. Then in the afternoon he went to the pictures, having totally forgotten about his horse and cart. He came out of the pictures and returned home to Malahide, by bus. On retiring to a local hostelry he opened the evening paper to see a photo of his horse and cart in O'Connell Street, under the caption: "Found in Dublin". He was back into town on the next bus on a retrieval mission.

I occasionally have a drink with a red-haired local man who, forty years ago, used to play small parts in some of our drama shows. One show, in particular, I remember. It was *The Face at the Window*. He was the "Face". I can guarantee you that he has been the only red-haired Negro ever to frequent Malahide.

Christmas 1988 saw me travelling again and I spent six weeks in Altanta, Georgia. On returning home I took it easy for a time as some of my old complaints were acting up again. I was scheduled for my quarterly check-up in hospital, and an operation was pending. I've noticed of late that there are many fine young comedians doing the circuit in Ireland. Brendan Grace seems to have a future in the comedy field, and I enjoy his T.V. shows. Quite a few promising comedians ring me up for "gags" occasionally. I suppose the gags will help to perpetuate my memory. I certainly won't be using them, on stage, any more.

A few years ago I began writing my memoirs and now, every Wednesday, have a meeting with my co-writer, Tom O' Shea. We spend a few hours together, discussing the script and enjoying

a glass of whiskey. I look forward to the Wednesday meetings, and hopefully, one day, my memoirs may be published.

I'm due at Beaumont Hospital next week for a small operation. I'm so used to hospitals now that I regard it as just another booking. One good thing about undergoing an operation is that you hold centre stage and get top billing. The poor old surgeon, nurses and administrative staff play lesser parts. Need I add, I sincerely hope that they play highly successful parts in the whole theatrical operation, but, of course, they're professionals, like myself.

EPILOGUE

Harry Bailey died peacefully in his sleep on Friday, 21st April, 1989. One of Malahide's most widely travelled inhabitants, he went quietly and unobtrusively as he was wont to stroll around Malahide streets in his latter years of retirement. On this occasion there were no advance bill-posters announcing his impending arrival. His three-minute bell now tolled its final knell, and his green, white and gold costume gave way to a duller grey. A sombre and staid hearse replaced his hitherto more exotic modes of travel such as two-seater planes, lumbering camels and his eye-catching Bugatti motorcar.

A former Lord Mayor of Malahide, and noted for his great charm, endless enthusiasm and infinite humour, he will surely be remembered as the man who filled people's lives with laughter.

The Bailey theatrical tradition continues as Harry's two sons—Brian and Alan—are involved in showbusiness in the Niagara region of Canada. Known as *The Bailey Brothers*, they play Irish music, tell gags and make records, while at the same time pursuing their respective careers as a teacher and a model-maker/draughtsman. Indeed, the Bailey showbusiness tradition seems assured of being kept alive well into the twenty-first century as Brian's son, and Harry's grandson—Chris—is already an accomplished guitarist and drummer. Tradition dies hard.

Harry leaves behind two sisters, two daughters, three sons, fourteen grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Though his catchphrase "Carry Me Out" has been taken literally, Harry Bailey's memory will live on, especially with all those connected with the stage, at home and abroad.

Harry, in his prime.

Tom O Shea, Vice-Principal. at Belcamp College, Dublin, has been writing historical articles for some years. Works already published include an *Historical Guide to Malahide* and the *History of St. Sylvester's Church.*He lectures extensively on local history and has contributed articles to numerous magazines and newsletters. Secretary to the Malahide Historical Society, he is Chairman of Malahide Museum, Chairman of the Association of Fingall Historical Societies and Chairman of the Fingall Heritage Group. He has also written the *History of Malahide Castle* and the Talbot Family, due to be published in Autumn 1990.